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# DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT TÜRKİYE

16 MAY 2025

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## ACRONYMS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
AUD	Australian Dollar (currency)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHP	Republican People's Party
CMHC	Community Mental Health Centre
DBP	Democratic Regions Party
DEM	People's Equality and Democracy Party
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
FETO	Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (Turkish Government name for the 'Gülen Movement')
FIDH-OMCT	Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
HDP	People's Democratic Party
HREIT	Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye
HSK	Board of Judges and Prosecutors
IHD	Human Rights Association
KCDP	We Will Stop Femicides Platform
KPS	Identity Information Sharing System
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and/or Asexual
MERNIS	Central Civil Registration System
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MIT	National Intelligence Organisation
NHREI	National Human Rights and Equality Institution
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDMM	Provincial Directorate of Migration Management
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SGK	Social Security Institution
TAK	Kurdistan Freedom Hawks
TRY	Turkish Lira (currency)
TSK	Turkish Armed Forces
TTB	Turkish Medical Association
TTM	Tarlabasi Community Center
YPG	Syrian People's Protection Units

## GLOSSARY

<i>Cemaat/Hizmet</i>	'Community' or 'Service' (alternative names for the 'Gülen Movement')
<i>Cemevi</i>	Alevi prayer hall
<i>Diyamet</i>	Directorate of Religious Affairs
<i>Imam hatip schools</i>	Vocational institutions devoted to the training of Muslim clergy
<i>Jandarma</i>	Local police
<i>Kimlik</i>	Temporary protection identification document
<i>Muhtar</i>	An elected village or neighbourhood representative
<i>Saglik Ocagi</i>	Primary healthcare clinics
<i>Vakiflar</i>	General Directorate for Foundations

### Terms used in this report

High risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
Moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
Low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

#### Official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

#### Societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers).

# 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This report was prepared for protection status decision makers by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It provides a factual overview distinct from Australian Government policy and does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.2 According to Ministerial Direction 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under the *Migration Act* (1958):

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination processes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.3 The report was prepared with regard to the current protection visa caseload without reference to individual applications. It provides DFAT's best assessment at the time of writing.

1.4 The report draws on in-country knowledge and discussions. It takes into account reporting from a range of credible sources including: other governments, United Nations agencies, human rights and civil society organisations, local and international media and academia. Source details may be omitted to protect sources.

1.5 This updated Türkiye Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Türkiye published on 10 September 2020.

## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2.1 Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Türkiye was occupied by French, British, Italian and Greek forces. A war of independence led by Mustafa Kemal 'Ataturk' ('Father of the Turks') freed the country from foreign occupation and concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, establishing the Republic of Türkiye in its modern form.

2.2 As Türkiye's first President, Ataturk implemented extensive reforms aimed at modernising Türkiye, secularising the state, adopting new legal codes and promoting education and women's rights. Initially a one-party state, Türkiye became a multi-party democracy in the 1940s. Since then, Türkiye has alternated between long periods of democratic, direct and indirect [military](#) rule following coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and a 'soft coup' in 1997.

2.3 Ataturk's 'Kemalist' ideology envisaged Türkiye as a country with a single ethnic identity. Assimilationist policies suppressing the language, culture and identity of ethnic minorities have long caused resentment, especially among Turkish [Kurds](#). Between 1984 and 2013, an ethnonationalist insurgency led by the [Kurdistan Workers' Party](#) (PKK) killed an estimated 40,000 people. A ceasefire signed in 2013 collapsed two years later, leading to a resumption of hostilities.

2.4 In March 2025, the PKK (designated a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, Australia, the United States and the European Union among others) declared a unilateral ceasefire following a call from its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, for it to disarm and dissolve. In May 2025, the PKK announced it would disband, formally ending one of the world's longest-running conflicts. The full implications of this development for Türkiye and the broader region were unknown at the time of writing. In addition to security operations against PKK fighters, the Turkish Government has actively targeted suspected supporters of the PKK, including opposition politicians, [journalists](#) and [human rights defenders](#).

2.5 Contemporary Turkish politics have been dominated by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been President since 2014, after serving as Prime Minister from 2003. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) initially positioned itself as liberal, reformist and pro-Western but over time its policies have become increasingly populist, socially conservative and authoritarian, in reaction to mass anti-government protests in 2013 and a failed coup in 2016. A constitutional referendum held in April 2017 transferred most executive and legislative powers to the Presidency and removed many checks and balances (see [Political System](#)).


2.6 On 15 July 2016, elements of the military, likely with the involvement of the [Gulen Movement](#), attempted a coup, deploying tanks in the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, bombing parliament and opening fire on protesters. After the coup failed, the government declared a [State of Emergency](#) and took steps to purge the state of Gulenist influence, including through mass arrests and the dismissal of thousands of allegedly disloyal civil servants.

2.7 In February 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck southern and central Türkiye, followed by a magnitude 7.5 earthquake nine hours later. The earthquakes killed at least 50,000 people and caused an estimated Turkish Lira (TRY) 2 trillion (USD103.6 billion) in damage. At the two-year mark since the earthquakes, survivors continued to face significant challenges accessing education, healthcare and housing services.

2.8 After a run-off in the 2023 general election, Erdogan was re-elected President for a third term with 52 per cent of the vote. Local elections in March 2024 resulted in significant gains for the opposition [Republican People's Party](#) (CHP) at the AKP's expense, interpreted by many commentators as an expression of dissatisfaction with the economy.

### DEMOGRAPHY

2.9 According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, Türkiye's population was 85.6 million in 2024. An estimated 70-75 per cent of the population is ethnically Turkish. Around 19 per cent is Kurdish, with the remainder consisting of various small minority ethnic groups. Türkiye hosts around 3.5 million asylum seekers and refugees, mostly from Syria (see [Asylum Seekers and Refugees](#)).



2.10 Türkiye is heavily urbanised, almost three quarters of the population live in cities. The most densely populated area is around the Bosphorus in the northwest, where Istanbul hosts a multi-ethnic population of around 15.7 million people. Other major cities include the capital Ankara (5 million), Izmir (4 million), Bursa (3 million), Adana (2 million) and Gaziantep (2 million). Türkiye has a young population, almost a quarter of the population is aged below 15, 40 per cent are aged below 29.

2.11 Turkish is the official language. The Constitution states no other language can be the main language of instruction in educational institutions. Other languages, including Kurdish, are commonly used in daily life and since 2012 have been allowed as an elective in [public schools](#), although access to such courses is limited. For religious demography, see [Religion](#).

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.12 Türkiye is the 17th largest economy in the world, with GDP per capita of AUD19,000 in 2023. It is a member of the OECD and the G20 and a significant foreign aid donor. The World Bank classifies Türkiye as an upper-middle income country. Its largely free market economy is driven by the textile, food, automotive and tourism sectors.

2.13 Türkiye's economy performed strongly for the first two decades of the 21st century, averaging annual growth of 5.4 per cent. Over the same period, GDP per capita doubled and poverty rates halved. Since 2018 a series of economic challenges have curbed growth and led to worsening living standards for many Turks. In-country sources told DFAT Türkiye's poor economic situation was a major driver of external migration.

2.14 Beginning in 2018, Türkiye suffered a currency and debt crisis, which saw the value of the Turkish Lira collapse and inflation soar. The crisis was precipitated by President Erdogan's unorthodox approach to monetary policy and insistence on low interest rates, which he claimed would restrain inflation. Despite (or, according to some experts, because of) these policies, inflation continued to rise, reaching 75 per cent year-on-year in May 2024 (inflation remained elevated in January 2025, at 42 per cent). Additionally, the TRY crashed in value, going from buying 30 US cents in 2018 to just 3 US cents in 2024. In response, the central bank reversed policy and increased interest rates, which reached 50 per cent in March 2024. The economy has started to recover, reaching 5.7 per cent growth in 2024 but is expected to slow in 2025 on the back of continued high inflation, currency instability, low productivity and weakening foreign direct investment.

### Employment


2.15 Employment levels and labour force participation rates have improved in recent years but remain low by OECD and European standards. Labour force participation in Türkiye increased to 54.7 per cent in May 2024, while unemployment stood at 8.4 per cent, its lowest level in more than a decade. Female labour participation remains low at 35 per cent for [women](#) compared to 72 per cent for men. There are substantial regional employment disparities, with unemployment higher in the southeast and lower in the northeast and Black Sea coastal regions.

### Welfare

2.16 The government provides pensions, disability benefits, unemployment insurance and universal [healthcare](#). Social assistance programs include cash transfers, housing aid and support for senior citizens and [people with disability](#). Conditional cash transfers support low-income families with children. Funding and coverage remain ongoing challenges, particularly for informal workers and [refugees](#).

2.17 Unemployment benefits are available to people who, before losing their job were formally employed, paid at least 600 days of unemployment insurance premiums in the last three years and worked continuously for 120 days. Benefits are paid monthly for between six and 10 months, depending on the insured period. Beneficiaries must actively seek work and, if required, participate in government-provided vocational training. Applications for unemployment benefits can be made online or at an office of the Turkish Employment Agency (ISKUR). General health insurance extends to those receiving unemployment benefits.

2.18 In January 2025, as part of ongoing efforts to increase fertility rates, President Erdogan announced a one-time payment of TRY5,000 (AUD216) for women who have a first child and a monthly allowance of TRY1,500 (AUD65) for a second child. Women who have a third and fourth child receive monthly support of TRY6,500 (AUD281) and



TRY11,500 (AUD498), respectively. These benefits are available to mothers of children born after 1 January 2025, payable until the child reaches the age of five. Eligibility requires Turkish citizenship and permanent residence.

## Health

2.19 The government provides universal healthcare through the Social Security Institution (SGK). Premiums are automatically deducted from wages covering workers for a range of essential treatments at SGK-registered hospitals. Out-of-pocket expenditure is required for some medications and outpatient services. Unemployed, self-employed and non-registered workers can pay premiums directly on a means-tested basis. The government pays premiums for those on low incomes. Children of unregistered adults receive automatic coverage.

2.20 Healthcare facilities in Türkiye range from local primary healthcare clinics (called *saglik ocagi*), offering services such as birth control, vaccinations and treatment of everyday illnesses, through to large state-run hospitals, private hospitals and university hospitals. Many state-run hospitals suffer from overcrowding and under-resourcing. Turks who can afford to do so often prefer to use the private system, which offers higher-quality services and shorter waiting periods. University hospitals offer a high standard of care. There is a substantial medical tourism sector in Türkiye which analysts say has boosted the quality and capacity of the healthcare system.

2.21 Non-communicable diseases account for almost 90 per cent of Türkiye's total deaths. Almost half of all deaths result from cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack and stroke, exacerbated by high salt intake, smoking and obesity. Communicable diseases of concern include hepatitis and tuberculosis. Türkiye was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. By December 2023 (the latest figures available), Türkiye had recorded more than 17 million cases of COVID-19 and around 100,000 confirmed deaths, although in-country sources told DFAT the actual number of deaths from COVID-19 was likely much higher. Given the scale of the crisis, Türkiye's health system fared relatively well. Sixty-three per cent of Türkiye's population received a complete primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine by December 2023.

2.22 Violence against health care workers sometimes occurs in Türkiye. In April 2020, Parliament passed laws increasing penalties for violence against health care workers. The Turkish Medical Association (Turk Tabipler Birligi, or TTB, the umbrella trade union for doctors in Türkiye) estimated in 2024 there were an average of 10 physical attacks on healthcare workers each day. According to in-country sources, many doctors left Türkiye to seek better pay and conditions overseas, contributing to a country-wide shortage of qualified physicians.

2.23 The TTB has drawn political controversy for its activities. In May 2019, 11 senior TTB members were sentenced to prison after criticising Turkish [military](#) operations in Syria. In-country sources told DFAT the government continued to prosecute doctors for expressing [political opinions](#) critical of the government.


## Mental Health

2.24 According to the Turkish Ministry of Health, 17 per cent of people in Türkiye suffer from mental health issues. The prevalence of depression and anxiety has risen in Türkiye in recent years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumption of antidepressants increased by 56 per cent between 2019 and 2024. Türkiye's large population of Syrian refugees reportedly suffers from high rates of depression, PTSD and other mental disorders, often related to experiences of conflict and displacement. In-country sources told DFAT people with mental illness in Türkiye sometimes suffered stigma and not everyone in need sought or received treatment.

2.25 Türkiye adopted a National Mental Health Policy in 2006, followed by a National Mental Health Action Plan in 2011. These arrangements shifted mental health services to a community-based system. As of May 2020 (most recent available figures), 177 Community Mental Health Centres (CMHCs) operated nationwide. Observers claim CMHCs are inadequately funded and the number of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals per capita is well below European Union averages.

## Drug and Alcohol Abuse

2.26 In-country sources told DFAT the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse in Türkiye was comparatively low, although little empirical data exists. A 2017 study on the use of illicit substances in Türkiye found in the previous 12 months, 1.8 per cent of those aged 15 to 34 years reported cannabis use and 0.2 per cent reported MDMA use. Some outpatient rehabilitation services exist for drug addicts. According to a 2017 report by TRT World, the national



broadcaster, there is a single live-in rehabilitation centre in Türkiye (located in the southern city of Gaziantep). Türkiye serves as a critical transit country between the Middle East and drug markets in Europe. Authorities actively combat drug smuggling, particularly as the drug trade is a key source of revenue for the PKK.

## People with Disability

2.27 Türkiye ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 and its Optional Protocol in 2015. The *Law on Persons with Disabilities* (2005) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability in all domains of social policy. The government sets employment quotas for people with disability, provides some [social protection](#), including pensions and reimbursements for certain services, and supports children who need specialised education services. Several NGOs advocate for the rights of people with disability.

2.28 Despite these protections, the employment rate of people with disability is low and rates of violence against people with disability, particularly women and girls with disability, is high (in relation to women and girls with disability, 35.8 per cent of respondents to a 2024 survey conducted by a local NGO reported experiencing abuse). According to the Social Rights and Research Society, an NGO, more than half of public buildings and shopping centres in Türkiye are not disability-friendly. In-country sources report people with disability are sometimes stigmatised and, as a result, their families sometimes keep them hidden.

## Education

2.29 Education is free and compulsory between the ages of five and 12 years. Primary school enrolment is close to 100 per cent. Pupils complete four years of elementary education, four years of middle school and four years of secondary school. Admission to secondary school is based on an examination at the end of middle school (Grade 8). Students can undertake secondary education at a general, technical or vocational high school.

2.30 Over the past two decades, the AKP Government has introduced a greater focus on religious instruction, including through increased time devoted to religious studies and by expanding the role of *imam hatip* schools which train Muslim clergy. Article 24 of the Constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public primary and secondary schools. Content is determined by the *Diyanet* (the national Directorate of Religious Affairs). Exemptions for those of other faiths are not always given. Some minority [religious communities](#) claim content in the religious curriculum is discriminatory.

2.31 Several Turkish universities appear in the top 400 in *The Times Higher Education World University Ranking*. Turkish universities attract large numbers of international students. Attendance at public universities is free for Turkish nationals. Private universities set their own fees.


2.32 In-country sources and international observers such as Human Rights Watch report academic freedom has been under serious threat in Türkiye for at least the past decade. Following the failed 2016 coup attempt, thousands of academics were dismissed for alleged links to the Gulen Movement. Thousands more have faced dismissal or legal charges for expressing views considered unacceptable by the government (see also [Political Opinion](#)).

## POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.33 Türkiye is a unitary parliamentary republic. The current Head of State and Head of Government is Recep Tayyip Erdogan, first elected President in 2014. Erdogan's party, the AKP, has been in government since 2002. Presidential elections were last held in May 2023.

2.34 Under constitutional changes passed in 2017, members of parliament ceased to select the president, with the role instead becoming filled by popular vote. The office of prime minister was abolished and the presidency given powers previously held by the prime minister and cabinet, including the power to: enact decrees on a wide range of issues without parliamentary approval, appoint vice presidents and ministers, propose the budget, annul parliament, declare an election and declare a state of emergency. The amendments also transferred legislative powers previously held by the national assembly to the presidency and limited the national assembly's authority to supervise ministers.

2.35 The Grand National Assembly is Türkiye's unicameral parliament. Members of parliament are elected from geographic electorates. There are 600 seats in parliament, and members serve five-year terms. Parliamentary elections coincide with presidential elections. Türkiye has 81 provinces, of which 30 are metropolitan municipalities.



Provinces are administered by a centrally appointed governor and an elected mayor. Governors are responsible for delivering services provided by the central government, including security, education, health and infrastructure. Mayors have jurisdiction over a range of ‘local’ services, including those related to culture and tourism, social services, agriculture, environmental planning and public works. Provinces are divided into districts, each administered by an appointed vice-governor and sub-governors. Provinces and municipalities may contain villages administered by an elected village head and a council of elders. Local elections take place every five years (most recently in March 2024).

## Corruption

2.36 Türkiye is a State Party to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and the Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption. Articles 247 and 252 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) criminalise active and passive bribery, facilitation payments, attempted corruption, extortion, bribing a foreign official, money laundering and abuse of office. Punishment for corruption-related offences can include imprisonment from five to 12 years.

2.37 Despite a strong legal framework, international and domestic observers report corruption is widespread in Türkiye’s public and private sectors and has worsened in recent years. Türkiye’s ranking in Transparency International’s *Corruption Perceptions Index* has declined sharply over the last decade, falling from 53 out of 177 countries in 2013 to 107 out of 180 countries in 2024. Public procurement and infrastructure projects are particularly vulnerable to corruption. Officials responsible for these projects have reportedly demanded bribes from contractors. Corrupt building approval and construction practices were blamed by many local and international observers as having contributed to the high number of fatalities and destroyed buildings caused by the 2023 [earthquakes](#). Domestic media reported inadequate fire safety measures in the deaths of 78 guests at the Grand Kartal Hotel in Bolu Province in January 2025 (several people were arrested for suspected negligence).

2.38 The European Commission reported in 2024 Türkiye was not implementing its international obligations in relation to the fight against corruption (including UNCAC) and could do more to limit political influence in corruption cases, combat corruption in the [legal system](#) and strengthen the accountability and transparency of public institutions. In-country sources told DFAT grand corruption was more common than petty corruption, although in 2022 almost 50 Istanbul [police](#) officers were arrested for involvement in a bribery ring that took payoffs to allow the passage of earth-moving trucks without necessary documentation.


## HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.39 The Constitution contains extensive guarantees of fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, association, movement, opinion, assembly and religion. These rights are not always upheld and many are subject to exceptions on the grounds of public order and national security.

2.40 Türkiye is a State Party to the following international human rights instruments: the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and its Optional Protocol (OP-CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its Second Optional Protocol Aiming to the Abolition of the Death Penalty, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Türkiye has also acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), although it withdrew from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (‘the Istanbul Convention’) in 2021. Article 90 of the Constitution states international agreements carry the force of law and cannot be appealed in the Constitutional Court.

## European Court of Human Rights

2.41 Türkiye has ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or



Punishment and additional protocols to both conventions. This enables Turkish citizens to bring relevant cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and binds Türkiye to implement the court's decisions. Türkiye has consistently accounted for a large proportion of cases before the court. In 2024, Türkiye had the highest number of applications allocated for judgement of any country. Despite the high number of applications, the ECHR rules on relatively few Turkish cases due to the requirement applicants exhaust domestic remedies first.

2.42 In the wake of the July 2016 attempted coup, the ECHR received many applications from Turkish citizens who had been detained for perceived links to the [Gülen Movement](#). To review these cases, Türkiye and European authorities agreed in January 2017 Türkiye would establish an Inquiry Commission on the State of Emergency. The commission rejected most claims, overturning a small number of decisions. Claimants whose appeals to the commission were rejected could proceed through the court system to the Constitutional Court and if unsuccessful there, could theoretically apply to the ECHR. Critics of the Inquiry Commission, including United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Mesopotamia Observatory of Justice, say it is slow, politicised and dysfunctional. In-country sources told DFAT even in cases where Türkiye had implemented ECHR decisions by freeing and compensating individual claimants, it has not amended the problematic laws that led to their unjust conviction in the first place.

## Ombudsman Institution

2.43 Türkiye established the Ombudsman Institution in 2012 as an independent complaint mechanism regarding the delivery of public services. It has a mandate to investigate, research and make recommendations on the compliance of official acts with the law, principles of fairness and human rights. It can receive individual applications but mostly deals with complaints concerning activities of the civil service, judiciary and security forces. Only around 1 per cent of its cases are related to human rights. Other government bodies with a role in promoting human rights include the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Department, the parliamentary Human Rights Commission and the [Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye](#) (HREIT).

## National Human Rights Institution

2.44 The *Law on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye* (2016) established the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (HREIT) as the country's national human rights institution (NHRI). HREIT replaced the Human Rights Institution of Türkiye, which had operated since June 2012. HREIT's core functions are monitoring, publishing research, recommendations and opinions, complaints handling, legal assistance, advising government, parliament and other bodies, supporting the work of human rights defenders, cooperation with civil society organisations and awareness-raising.


2.45 In 2021, HREIT applied for accreditation with Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the UN's accreditation body for NHRIs. HREIT was granted 'B' status by GANHRI in 2022, meaning it is partially compliant with GANHRI's standards under the Paris Principles for NHRIs. NGOs and international observers have criticised HREIT (and its predecessor) for lacking independence, noting the frequency with which it rejects applications, that it reports to and is funded by the government and that eight of its 11 board members are appointed by Cabinet and the remaining three by the President.

## SECURITY SITUATION

2.46 Türkiye faces a range of internal and external security challenges, including a long-running conflict between government security forces and the PKK in the southeast, Turkish military involvement in Syria and Iraq and the threat of terrorist attacks.

### Armed Conflict

2.47 Turkish forces have conducted security operations in several provinces in the southeast of the country since the collapse of a ceasefire between Türkiye's Government and the [PKK](#) in July 2015. These operations have involved infantry, artillery and armoured units, as well as the Turkish Airforce. According to the International Crisis Group, from July 2014 to July 2024, at least 7,040 people were killed in clashes or terror attacks related to this conflict. This includes civilians, state security force members, individuals of unknown affiliation and PKK militants. Clashes



continued throughout 2023 and 2024, although at a lower tempo than in previous years (see [Kurds](#) and [Extrajudicial Killings](#)). In March 2025, the PKK announced it would lay down its arms and disband (see [Country Overview](#)).

2.48 Since 2016, Türkiye has carried out security operations in Syria and northern Iraq with the stated aim of securing its borders and degrading the ability of Kurdish fighters to launch attacks on Turkish soil. Türkiye has occupied parts of northern Syria since 2016, including the towns of al-Bab, Azaz, Jarabulus, Rajo, Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. Turkish-supported opposition forces have seized further territory since the collapse of Syria's Assad regime in December 2024. Türkiye's occupation has been controversial. Some observers have accused Turkish forces and Turkish-supported Syrian militias of human rights violations, including deliberately displacing Kurdish residents in favour of Arab settlers.

2.49 Turkish armed forces have also conducted cross-border operations against PKK targets in northern Iraq and maintain bases there. In July 2024, President Erdogan said Türkiye would soon end its military operations in northern Iraq but no draw-down had taken place at the time of writing.

## **Terrorism**

2.50 A range of terrorist groups have been active in Türkiye since at least the 1960s. These include left-wing groups, Kurdish groups such as the PKK and the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) and Islamist groups such as Islamic State (also known as IS, ISIL, ISIS or Da'esh). At various times, these groups have carried out attacks against security forces and civilians across Türkiye. Attacks peaked around 2015-16, when Islamic State, the TAK and other groups carried out multiple mass-casualty attacks, including bombings in Ankara, Istanbul and Gaziantep that killed dozens, a shooting attack in an Istanbul nightclub that killed 57 and a shooting and suicide bomb attack on Istanbul's Ataturk Airport that killed 48 people.

2.51 Terrorist attacks have decreased in recent years after sustained counter-terrorism operations by Turkish security forces. Nevertheless, an underlying threat of terrorism remains. In November 2022, a bombing in Istiklal Avenue in Istanbul killed six people and injured 81. Turkish authorities blamed the PKK and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), although no group claimed responsibility. In October 2023, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device near the Ministry of Interior in Ankara injuring two police officers for which the PKK claimed responsibility. In January 2024, masked assailants attacked a Roman Catholic church in Istanbul, killing one person. Islamic State claimed responsibility. In October 2024, PKK militants carried out a shooting and suicide bomb attack on a Turkish aerospace plant near Ankara, killing five people (plus the two militants) and injuring 22.

## 3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

### RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 Article 10 of the Constitution states all individuals are equal regardless of language or race. Article 66 states every Turkish citizen is a 'Turk'. Article 42 states no language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of education. The cultural, linguistic and religious rights of certain non-Muslim groups are guaranteed under the Treaty of Lausanne (see [Lausanne Minorities](#)).

3.2 Many ethnic minorities view the Constitution's insistence on a single national identity and the subordinate status of languages other than Turkish as discriminatory. In addition, government language, education, and media policies have often sought to suppress minority ethnic identities. The US Department of State's 2023 *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Turkey* says ethnic and religious minorities including Arabs, Assyrians, Circassians, Jaferis, [Kurds](#), Laz, Roma and [Yazidis](#) are 'not permitted to fully exercise their linguistic, [religious](#), and cultural rights'.

#### Kurds

3.3 The Kurds are an ethnolinguistic group native to southeastern Türkiye, northwestern Iran, northern Iraq and northern Syria. Although official figures were not available at the time of writing, international observers estimate around 15 million Turkish citizens are Kurdish. Most Kurdish people speak Kurmanji (commonly referred to as Kurdish), a smaller number speak Zaza or Sorani. Many Kurds are physically indistinguishable from other Turks but some may be identified by their darker skin and facial features, as well as ethnic markers such as accent and clothing. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim, but of the *Shafi'i* rather than *Hanafi* school to which most ethnic Turks adhere. Turkish religious authorities consider both schools equally valid. Followers of the *Shafi'i* school are not subject to discrimination on religious grounds.


3.4 The Kurdish population has traditionally been concentrated in southeastern Anatolia, where Kurds are the majority ethnic group and northeastern Anatolia, where Kurds are a significant minority. Significant Kurdish populations also live in Istanbul and other major cities. Eastern and southeastern Türkiye have historically been less developed than other parts of the country, with lower incomes, higher poverty rates, less industry and less government investment. In recent decades, many Kurds have migrated to western Türkiye to escape conflict (see [Security Situation](#)) and seek economic opportunities.

3.5 The Kurdish community is diverse, encompassing a broad range of political views and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some Kurds lead traditional lifestyles, especially in rural areas, while others are highly assimilated and may be impossible to distinguish from other Turks. Some Kurds support the ideology and methods of the PKK but many are opposed. The AKP has, at times, attracted significant support from conservative Kurds (the party has Kurdish MPs and has had Kurdish Cabinet ministers). Many Kurds support the [People's Equality and Democracy \(DEM\) Party](#), a left-wing social democratic party infused with Kurdish nationalism. Despite this diversity, some non-Kurdish Turks associate all Kurds with PKK terrorism.

3.6 A range of historic policies sought to assimilate ethnic minorities into a majority Turkish nation by suppressing public expressions of minority identity, including public use of the Kurdish language, place names, songs, and public support for Kurdish political parties, particularly those perceived as separatist. For much of the 20th century, the words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' were banned. From 1983-1991 it was illegal to speak Kurdish in public and until 2003 it was illegal to give children Kurdish names. Such policies caused resentment and fuelled the long-running conflict between Türkiye's Government and the PKK.

3.7 The AKP Government has gradually wound back restrictions on expression of minority identity. Most are now officially revoked. In 2009, the AKP introduced Kurdish-language television services, widely seen as recognising the importance of the Kurdish language for many Turks. Kurdish can be taught as an elective language in public schools and as a primary language of instruction, but not mother-tongue, in private schools. In recent years, authorities have reinstated Kurdish place names to many villages and neighbourhoods, although in some instances these have since been removed.

3.8 In-country sources reported there remained significant barriers to expression of Kurdish identity, particularly at the local level and related to the Kurdish language. In October 2024, the government banned a locally produced



Kurdish movie from Turkish cinemas on the grounds it was ‘not suitable for commercial circulation’ (the movie depicted challenges faced by Kurdish artists in Türkiye, including restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language). In September 2024, in the province of Diyarbakir, the Silvan district governor rejected the district municipality’s decision to rename a park ‘Rindexan’ after a Kurdish heroine, because the name was in a ‘foreign language’. Also in September 2024, the Ministry of Interior appointed an inspector to investigate multilingual early childhood education centres in the Kurdish-majority city Diyarbakir (the capital city of the province of the same name).

3.9 In August 2024, the government-appointed District Governor’s Office of Bahcesaray in the Kurdish-majority province of Van declared weddings subject to the permission of the *Jandarma* (local police) because Kurdish weddings offered a ‘gateway’ to PKK membership. Human Rights Watch reported in August 2024, in some provinces, dancing *halay* (a traditional dance) to Kurdish-language songs resulted in wedding guests being charged with ‘spreading terrorist propaganda’ on the grounds it offered ‘morale and motivation’ to the PKK. Türkiye’s Media and Law Studies Association reported in March 2024 the government had banned at least 28 concerts and cultural events in the Kurdish language since 2019.

### **Societal treatment of Kurds**

3.10 In-country sources told DFAT Kurds sometimes experienced overt racism and oral and physical attacks, especially in parts of Western Türkiye where they are in the minority. In August 2024, an Iraqi Kurdish businessman was fatally stabbed in Istanbul. The man’s family alleged he was targeted after being overheard speaking Kurdish on the phone, although the Turkish Government refuted the claim. Also in August 2024, police beat and detained three construction workers for listening to Kurdish songs in a local park in the northwestern city of Balikesir. In 2023, six Kurdish construction workers were subject to a lynching attempt in Trabzon for listening to music loudly. In 2022, three Kurdish university students were attacked by a 30-person group in Antalya. In July 2021, a Kurdish family of seven was murdered and their house set alight in Konya. Authorities blamed a long-running family feud, although Kurdish activists asserted the attack was racially motivated.

3.11 In-country sources told DFAT laws against hate speech were not used to protect Kurds and other ethnic minorities from racial abuse but were instead used to silence government critics. For example, non-Kurdish football fans have reportedly hurled racial abuse at Kurdish football teams with impunity, while Kurdish supporters with a pro-peace banner at a football match were arrested for spreading terrorist propaganda.


3.12 No laws prevent Kurds (or other ethnic minorities) from obtaining public or private sector employment, participating in public life, or accessing the government health and education services available to other Turkish citizens. Nevertheless, in-country sources told DFAT Kurds sometimes experienced discrimination while accessing services such as [healthcare](#), especially if they did not speak Turkish well, particularly in the west, where Kurdish-language services are generally unavailable. While many Kurds hold positions in government, the civil service and the [military](#), traditionally they have been under-represented in senior roles.

### **Conflict between Turkish security forces and the PKK**

3.13 Since 1978, an insurgency led by the PKK and opposed by Turkish security forces has killed an estimated 40,000 people and displaced an estimated 3 million. Following the collapse of a ceasefire between Türkiye’s Government and the PKK in 2015 (see [Security Situation](#)), fighting escalated. From 2015 to 2017, violence in urban centres in Kurdish-majority regions killed hundreds of civilians, state security forces and PKK militants, and displaced an estimated 350,000 people.

3.14 Between 2015 and 2019, security operations against the PKK heavily impacted many residents in southeastern Türkiye. Both sides were accused of human rights violations, including terrorist attacks and kidnappings by the PKK, and arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings by Turkish security forces. The conflict caused significant internal displacement. Between July 2015 and July 2017, approximately 100,000 people lost their homes and up to 400,000 people were forced to move to neighbouring suburbs, towns and villages or to other regions within Türkiye.

3.15 Conditions eased significantly after 2017 as the tempo of urban operations reduced and fighting moved across the border into Iraq and Syria. In-country sources told DFAT, generally speaking, the security situation for Kurds in Türkiye was better than in the 1990s and during the ‘urban fighting’ of 2015 and 2016. They also said



extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances were now rare. However, in-country sources and international observers report other violations continue, including arbitrary detention and excessive use of force and torture in detention. According to the US Department of State, Turkish authorities continue to use curfews and ‘special security zones’ to facilitate counter-PKK operations in the southeast, which sometimes restricts movements of visitors and residents. Following a call in February 2025 from jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan for the PKK to lay down arms, the PKK announced a unilateral ceasefire in March 2025 and, in May 2025, its dissolution (see [Country Overview](#)).

3.16 DFAT assesses the relative treatment of Kurds in Türkiye varies according to their geographic location, degree of involvement in Kurdish political causes and degree of expression of Kurdish ethnic and linguistic identity. In Kurdish-majority areas in the southeast of the country, Kurds who are not politically active face a low risk of official discrimination in the form of harassment by security forces, which increases during periods of active security operations. In these Kurdish-majority areas, Kurds are generally not at risk of societal discrimination.

3.17 DFAT assesses [Kurdish politicians](#), [human rights defenders](#) and political activists face a high risk of official discrimination throughout the country in the form of monitoring, harassment, arrests and prosecution for alleged terrorist activities, regardless of their actual involvement. In areas where Kurds are in the minority, especially central Anatolia, Kurds who publicly express their ethnic and linguistic identity face a low risk of societal violence and discrimination in the form of hate crimes by ultra-nationalist Turks, although the risk can increase based on domestic and regional events involving the PKK or its alleged affiliates. Culturally assimilated Kurds are generally not at risk of official or societal discrimination or violence.

## Yazidis

3.18 The Yazidis are a religious group historically concentrated in northwestern Iraq but also found in neighbouring countries, including Türkiye. Their distinctive, syncretic religion is influenced by the beliefs and practices of Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity. Some Yazidis identify as ethnically [Kurdish](#), while others view themselves as having a distinct ethnic identity.

3.19 The majority of Yazidis residing in Türkiye in recent years have been refugees fleeing conflict in Iraq and Syria. Almost all have since been resettled in third countries, including Australia. A much smaller number of Yazidis are long-term Turkish residents. In-country sources were unable to give DFAT an accurate estimate but in 2017 the Yazidi Cultural Foundation estimated Türkiye’s Yazidi population at 377 people.


3.20 Given the small size of the Yazidi population in Türkiye, information about their treatment is scarce. In-country sources told DFAT Yazidis were subject to societal discrimination and their properties were sometimes illegally seized but were unable to provide specific examples. The most recent major incident was in March 2020, when a 300-year-old Yazidi cemetery was vandalised in the southeastern province of Mardin. In June 2020, Türkiye targeted areas in Iraq where the Yazidi community resides and where it alleged the PKK had reportedly established bases as part of counter-PKK military operations.

3.21 The massacre of Yazidis in Iraq by Islamic State in 2014 and 2015 is well-documented (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on Iraq](#)). A 2022 report by the Yazidi Justice Committee (YJC), a group of prominent human rights lawyers, alleged the Turkish Government directly and indirectly supported Islamic State abuses against the Yazidis, including by allowing Islamic State fighters to freely cross the Turkish border and by providing training for Islamic State affiliates in Türkiye. Türkiye’s Government rejects these claims.

3.22 DFAT assesses, given the small size of their community, location in southeastern Türkiye and association with refugee communities, Turkish Yazidis are likely to face a moderate level of societal and official discrimination.

## RELIGION

3.23 Article 2 of the Constitution defines Türkiye as a secular state. Article 10 states all individuals are equal before the law regardless of their philosophical belief, religion or sect. Article 15 states no one may be compelled to reveal his or her religion. Article 24 guarantees the right to freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. The state has traditionally interpreted secularism as requiring state control over religious communities, including their practices and houses of worship. The *Diyanet* manages the practice of Islam, the General Directorate for Foundations (*Vakıflar*) manages all other religions.



3.24 Türkiye's Government claims 99 per cent of the population is Muslim but this figure does not reflect the full religious diversity in the country. By most estimates [Alevi](#)s (not all of whom identify as Muslim) are the largest religious minority group, making up between 10-30 per cent of the population or 10-25 million people. The Shi'a Ja'fari community claims to constitute up to 4 per cent of the population or around 3 million people, although their numbers are difficult to verify. They live predominantly in the east. Up to 500,000 Alawites reportedly live in the southern regions neighbouring Syria, particularly Hatay province (this number does not include Syrian Alawite refugees who fled to Türkiye since 2011). Relations in Türkiye between Muslim communities (Sunni and non-Sunni) are generally harmonious, without the sectarian divides experienced in some neighbouring countries.

3.25 Türkiye's non-Muslim religious communities are small. There are approximately 165,000 Christians across various denominations, the largest of which are [Armenian](#) Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Syrian Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Protestants (these numbers exclude Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox who have reportedly moved to Türkiye in large numbers since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022). Smaller Christian communities include [Greek](#) Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Armenian Catholics and Chaldean Christians. The [Jewish](#) community numbers fewer than 20,000 people. Small Baha'i and [Yazidi](#) communities also live in Türkiye, although their numbers are unclear. Non-Muslim religious communities are mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other major cities, as well as in southeast Türkiye.

### **Blasphemy/Insult of Religion**

3.26 Türkiye does not explicitly outlaw blasphemy but Article 216(3) of the *Criminal Code* (2004) states any person who openly disrespects the religious belief of a group can be punished with imprisonment from six months to one year if such act causes potential risk for public peace. In-country sources told DFAT this law was often used to prosecute people perceived as insulting Sunni Islam but rarely to defend religious minorities from insult.

3.27 People who offend religious sensibilities are also sometimes charged under Article 216(1) of the *Criminal Code* (2004), which outlaws 'publicly provoking hatred and enmity in one section of the public against another section which has different characteristics based on social class, race, religion, sect, or region, which creates an explicit and imminent danger to public security', punishable with imprisonment from six months to one year.


3.28 There was a spate of prosecutions under these laws between 2014 and 2016, including of [journalists](#) who reprinted French cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad in 2016. In 2020, authorities attempted to prosecute a [CHP](#) party official for sharing a social media post about the 'Ciao Bella affair', where hackers tapped into mosque speaker systems in Izmir and played Italian protest music. In May 2023, a pop singer was charged with provoking hatred and enmity after joking one of her musicians had been 'perverted' by his religious education. In October 2023, a man was charged with provoking hatred and enmity based on a social media post of the burning of a Quran. Both individuals received 10-month suspended sentences. In February 2023, a folk singer was sentenced to six months in prison for 'insulting moral religious values' of Alevi after he mocked an Alevi holy figure in song lyrics. The sentence was later converted to a fine equivalent to AUD100.

3.29 DFAT assesses people who are perceived as publicly insulting religion face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of criminal charges for their speech. These charges rarely result in prison time.

### **Alevi**

3.30 Alevism is a heterodox branch of Islam incorporating Shi'a, Sufi, Sunni and local traditions. Practising Alevi read from the same Islamic texts as mainstream Muslims but worship in a *cemevi* (prayer hall) rather than a mosque. Men and women pray alongside each other, worship in Turkish rather than Arabic and are not expected to pray five times a day. Alevi do not fast during Ramadan. While most Alevi regard their faith as a separate religion, some identify as Shi'a or Sunni or see their Alevi identity predominantly in cultural rather than religious terms. Most Alevi are secular, supporting strict separation of religion and politics. Alevi reported they could generally conduct religious ceremonies and celebrate religious festivals without official interference.

3.31 Estimates of the size of the Alevi population vary considerably, although most credible estimates are between 10-25 million. Many Alevi are also [Kurds](#), although estimated numbers again vary considerably (from half a million to several million). In-country sources told DFAT Kurdish Alevi were more likely to identify primarily as Alevi, rather than as Kurds. While Alevi are widely distributed across Türkiye, they are concentrated in central and



inner-eastern Anatolia, Istanbul and other major cities. Tunceli is the centre of the Alevi faith. Its population is overwhelmingly (95 per cent) Alevi. Ordinary Alevis generally keep a low societal profile and do not highlight their religious identity, including through their everyday dress.

3.32 The Turkish state does not recognise Alevism as a separate religion and considers Alevis to be Muslims. *Cemevis* are not recognised as official places of worship at the national level and, unlike mosques, do not receive public funding to support their construction or maintenance. The ECHR ruled in April 2015 Türkiye's Government was violating the European Convention by not recognising Alevi places of worship and religious leaders. Other ECHR judgements ruled only Alevi leaders could determine the faith to which their community belonged and Alevi students should be exempt from compulsory religious education classes conducted by Sunni imams. Some Alevis claim such classes teach Alevi students incorrect information about their own faith. Alevi community representatives told DFAT the ECHR decisions had not been implemented.

3.33 Alevis have played a prominent role in Turkish politics, particularly within the [CHP](#), which has had strong Alevi representation. The former leader of the CHP and Erdogan's rival for the Presidency in 2023, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, is an Alevi, although as a politician he did not emphasise his religion. While most Alevis support the CHP, Alevis have also achieved parliamentary representation in other parties, including the AKP.

3.34 No laws prevent Alevis (or other religious minorities) obtaining public sector employment or serving in the [military](#). Nevertheless, in-country sources told DFAT it was difficult for Alevis to enter the civil service due to discriminatory hiring practices, including 'questions about Islam difficult for Alevis to answer'. The same sources claimed there was an informal barrier to Alevis holding senior positions such as provincial governor, high school principal or high-ranking soldier. In-country sources told DFAT Alevis generally did not experience discrimination when accessing public services.

3.35 The Alevi community has suffered societal violence in the past, including the 1993 Siva massacre, where Sunni fundamentalists set fire to a hotel, killing 35 people, mostly Alevis. Today, physical violence against Alevis is rare but still occasionally occurs. For example, five Alevi *cemevis* were vandalised and an Alevi religious leader was assaulted in a religiously-motivated attack in 2022. In 2019, several *cemevis* and Alevi tombs and shrines were vandalised and had derogatory statements painted on them. In-country sources told DFAT religiously-motivated vandalism of Alevi homes occurred in 2023.


3.36 President Erdogan has made some attempts to reach out to the Alevi community, including by visiting *cemevis* and establishing an Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Cemevi Presidency (sub-ministry) in the Ministry of Culture. Many Alevis remain sceptical of these gestures. In-country sources told DFAT President Erdogan had made statements comparing Alevi worship to musical theatre and when he visited an Alevi centre of worship in 2023, his staff required the removal of portraits of Alevi religious figures leaving only a portrait of Atatürk.

3.37 DFAT assesses Alevis face a low risk of official and societal discrimination in the form of occasional vandalism of Alevi places of worship and private homes. While they do not enjoy the benefits of official recognition as a separate religion, Alevis are generally able to worship freely and participate in most areas of Turkish life, including politics and can generally access public services like other Turks. [Kurdish](#) Alevis do not face any additional religious-based discrimination beyond those who only identify as Alevi.

## Recognised Religious Groups (The 'Lausanne Minorities')

3.38 The Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which formalised the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and laid the foundation for modern Türkiye, guaranteed the rights of 'non-Muslim minorities' in Türkiye. The government has traditionally interpreted this as referring to the three major religious minorities in Türkiye at the time, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews, together known as the 'Lausanne minorities' (Türkiye formally refers to these groups as 'non-Muslim minorities').

3.39 The Lausanne minorities, whose populations have all decreased significantly since 1923, today reside primarily in Istanbul and other major urban centres in western Türkiye. They enjoy certain rights, including the right to maintain existing religious foundations, build new houses of worship and establish and run religious schools. In-country sources from the Lausanne minorities told DFAT they were able to worship freely, including through holding religious events and ceremonies.



3.40 Despite their special status, Türkiye's Government does not recognise the leadership or administrative structure of Lausanne minorities (such as the Christian patriarchates or chief rabbinate) as legal entities, preventing them from buying or holding title to property and from pressing claims in court. It also means they cannot legally open bank accounts, employ teachers or charge tuition fees for the schools they run, which, according to in-country sources, means fees must instead be collected as charitable 'donations'.

3.41 The Lausanne minorities (and other religious minority communities) rely on independent foundations with separate governing boards to hold and control individual religious properties. These foundations have reportedly been unable to renew the membership of their governing boards because Türkiye's Government has not introduced new regulations since repealing previous rules in 2013.

3.42 The state expropriated a significant amount of property from Lausanne minority communities (and other religious minorities) in the late Ottoman and early Republican period (from 1915 to roughly the mid-1930s, although similar policies continued well into the 1960s). Since 2001, and especially since a 2011 governmental decree, Türkiye's Government has returned more than 1,000 properties (valued at more than USD1 billion) and paid compensation for others. Communities have complained about delays or denials. In-country sources told DFAT as of 2024, only 20 per cent of properties had been returned or received compensation. The 2011 decree does not apply to other religious minorities or to properties seized before 1936.

### **Armenians**

3.43 In-country sources told DFAT Armenians faced bullying and discriminatory treatment while completing compulsory military service. On 24 April 2011, a date memorialised by Armenians as the anniversary of the suffering they endured during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, an Armenian citizen of Türkiye was shot dead during his military service by a fellow conscript. His murderer was later sentenced to 16 years in prison. A 2024 article by the BIA news agency described a former Armenian conscript being forced to announce his religious identity in front of his military unit and being confronted by a commanding officer about the suffering endured during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. In June 2024, in-country sources told DFAT about the recent death of an Armenian conscript they alleged had been subjected to excessive 'hard labour'. In June 2020, authorities jailed an individual for five years for breaking the cross off the fence of an Armenian church in Istanbul.

### **Greeks**


3.44 Türkiye's Greek population declined sharply during the 20th century, including due to mass expulsions in 1914, 1923 and 1964. Today, there are only around 2,000 Greeks living in Türkiye, mostly in Istanbul. A small number also live on the island of Imbros, where they have been able to re-establish Greek schools and businesses in recent years. In-country sources reported Greeks were able to worship freely and did not generally experience discrimination in their day-to-day lives, although this could vary during times of tension between Greece and Türkiye. Like other minorities, there were occasional reports of isolated violence against Greeks in Türkiye. In May 2019, an 86-year-old Greek Orthodox man was murdered in his home, reportedly for reasons linked to his religion.

### **Jews**

3.45 There are an estimated 16,000-17,000 Jews in Türkiye. There have been rising concerns about antisemitism in Türkiye, especially following the 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks and subsequent Israel-Hamas War. Incidents in 2023 included a taxi driver claiming he would not take Jewish passengers, a bookstore owner hanging a sign saying 'no Jews allowed' in his store window and the vandalism of the Etz Hayim Synagogue in Izmir. In 2019, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the Beth Israel Synagogue in Izmir. The Turkish Jewish community has expressed concern about antisemitic rhetoric in the media and from senior members of the government. DFAT is not aware of recent physical violence against Jews in Türkiye.

### **Treatment of Lausanne minorities**

3.46 Despite the legal protections they enjoy, in-country sources told DFAT members of the Lausanne minorities still sometimes experienced discrimination. Examples include bullying in schools and the [military](#), hate speech in the [media](#) and by politicians and material in the school curriculum which they said depicted Armenians, Greeks and Jews as 'traitors'. Hate speech reportedly tends to peak at times of heightened tension between Türkiye and Greece,



Armenia or Israel. In-country sources told DFAT hate speech against minority communities was often printed in regional newspapers, where it escaped the notice of national and international media.

3.47 No official restrictions prevent members of the Lausanne minorities (or other religious minorities) gaining public sector employment or promotion and Article 70 of the Constitution specifically states every Turk has the right to enter public service. Nevertheless, in-country sources told DFAT non-Muslims in general, and Armenians in particular, were often excluded from employment in the civil service and police on the basis of religion and/or ethnicity, which they said were identifiable from their national ID cards. They also said it was rare to see religious minorities in senior roles in the government or military. DFAT is aware of prominent Jewish and Armenian individuals in the private sector who enjoy good relations with the state. In-country sources told DFAT Lausanne minorities did not experience discrimination when accessing public services such as [health](#) and [education](#).

3.48 DFAT assesses, although their rights are constitutionally guaranteed, members of the Lausanne minorities face an overall moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of exclusionary hiring practices and occasional hate speech by members of the government. This is particularly the case for Armenians and Jews. Members of the Lausanne minorities face a low risk of societal discrimination and violence, in the form of occasional bullying, hate speech and sporadic physical attacks. Armenians who serve in the military face a moderate risk of discrimination in the form of bullying and harassment and a low risk of violence in the form of racist attacks.

## Other Unrecognised Religious Groups

3.49 Members of unrecognised religious groups (including Baha'is, [Yazidis](#), Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses) do not enjoy the same rights as the Lausanne minorities in relation to operating schools, officially registering their places of worship, or reclaiming properties expropriated by the state. Unrecognised religious groups are generally able to conduct religious services without official interference but are rarely able to register new places of worship.

3.50 The US Department of State's 2023 *Report on Religious Freedom for Türkiye* states Jehovah's Witnesses were frequently fined when preaching door-to-door and in public spaces for 'public disturbance' or 'occupying the sidewalk'. DFAT is aware of occasional reports of vandalism against properties owned by unrecognised religious groups and of threats against their clergy. Police have provided protection in response to such threats, although some communities argue police responses are not always adequate.

3.51 DFAT assesses members of unrecognised religious groups face a low risk of official and societal discrimination, comparable to that of the [Lausanne minorities](#) and [Alevis](#).

## Atheists

3.52 A 2023 survey of religious belief in Türkiye by the Ankara Institute, a think tank, found around 2 per cent of respondents identified as atheist. Türkiye's constitution defines the Republic as a secular state and forbids 'even partially basing' the order of the state on religious tenets.

3.53 While atheists are legally entitled to express their convictions, and some actively do so online and in the media, in-country sources said atheists frequently experienced criticism and oral abuse from religious Turks. Some atheists reported being threatened and physically abused by religious family members. According to the US Department of State, atheists are rarely granted exemptions from compulsory religious education in schools. In-country sources said atheists who publicly criticised religion were sometimes targeted under Article 216(3) of the *Criminal Code* (2004). They also reported many atheists felt compelled to hide their beliefs from their employers for fear of discrimination. Most atheists are reportedly identified as Muslims on their national ID cards and in-country sources said few seek to change this after renouncing religious beliefs.

3.54 DFAT assesses atheists in Türkiye who actively express their beliefs face a low risk of official discrimination, in the form of charges under the *Criminal Code* (2004) for openly disrespecting religion and a moderate risk of societal discrimination, in the form of oral and online abuse and potential employment discrimination. Atheists who belong to highly religious or conservative families face a moderate risk of oral (and sometimes physical) abuse, although this will depend on individual family and community circumstances.

## POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.55 Türkiye is politically diverse. A wide range of political views and ideologies are represented in its parliament, at other levels of government and in the community. The Constitution contains numerous articles guaranteeing the freedoms of political opinion, assembly and expression, although most of these articles contain clauses to allow restrictions on national security grounds. Over the past two decades, the government has increasingly sought to crack down on political dissent, particularly following the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the 2016 attempted coup. It uses a variety of tools to do this, including counter-terrorism legislation, criminal defamation suits and various laws passed during the state of emergency between 2016 and 2018.

### Counter-terrorism laws

3.56 Over the past decade, Türkiye's Government has detained thousands of people for alleged terrorism offences. This includes people with alleged links to the PKK and the [Gülen Movement](#), which Türkiye refers to as the Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETO) or Parallel State Structure (PDY). While the PKK is designated a terrorist organisation by many governments (including Australia), the Gülen Movement is not widely recognised as such outside Türkiye. While some of those charged have been directly involved in terrorism, others have been convicted on the basis of limited or no evidence in trials widely criticised as politically motivated and aimed at silencing human rights defenders and critics of the government.

3.57 The main domestic legislation relating to terrorism is the *Law on the Fight against Terrorism* (the Counter-Terrorism Law 1991, last amended 2019) as well as relevant articles of the *Criminal Code* (2004), including Article 220, which deals with criminal organisations, and Article 314, which deals with armed organisations. These laws have been criticised as vague and overly broad, including by the ECHR, the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.


3.58 Turkish law provides for a high degree of impunity for officials involved in counter-terrorism operations under *Law No. 6722* (2016). The law, which applies retrospectively, requires executive authority permission to prosecute any soldier or civilian taking part in counter-terrorism operations for any offence. According to a 2017 report by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the law grants counter-terrorism forces effective immunity from prosecution and renders investigations into allegations of torture or ill-treatment committed by them difficult, if not impossible.

### Criminal defamation and 'insulting the President'

3.59 Several articles of the *Criminal Code* (2004) prohibit defamation (defined as 'insult') against the Turkish state, its symbols and its representatives. Article 299(1) applies a penalty of six months to three years imprisonment for insults against the Turkish nation, state or Grand National Assembly and Article 299(2) applies the same penalty to those who publicly degrade the government, judicial bodies, the military or security organisations. Other articles criminalise burning the Turkish flag, 'degrading' the national anthem, insulting a public committee and insulting the memory of a dead person.

3.60 Under Article 299(1) of the *Criminal Code* (2004), insulting the President attracts a penalty of one to four years imprisonment, increased by one-sixth if the offence is committed publicly. Government officials can bring charges on the President's behalf. According to in-country sources and international human rights observers, this law has been widely used to silence government critics. In 2023, *Turkish Minute*, a German-based news website, reported since 2014 more than 160,000 people had been investigated under the law, 45,000 charged and 13,000 convicted. A broad range of actions have been deemed as 'insulting'. For example, a university student was charged in 2023 for insulting President Erdogan after making mocking comments about the 'President of Uzbekistan'.

3.61 Most defamation cases have applied to [journalists](#) but cases have also been filed against writers, politicians, athletes, students, academics and school children. In one prominent case in July 2018, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the [CHP](#) leader, was found guilty of defaming Erdogan and his family after claiming they had transferred money abroad and was ordered to pay a fine of TRY359,000 (then AUD100,000). More recent cases include a 16-year old charged with insulting the President after allegedly swearing at a presidential motorcade in May 2024 and a 14-year old charged after posting in a WhatsApp group in July 2023.



3.62 Most cases prosecuted under Article 299 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) do not result in prison sentences, although many of those charged spend time in pre-trial detention. In-country sources told DFAT the use of Article 299 has created an environment of intimidation and self-censorship among journalists and ordinary citizens.

## State of Emergency

3.63 Following the attempted coup of 15 July 2016, Türkiye's Government declared a three-month nationwide state of emergency. The purpose of the state of emergency was 'to take required measures in the most speedy and effective manner in the fight against the Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETO) and to return to normalcy as soon as possible'. The state of emergency concluded at midnight on 18 July 2018 after seven three-month extensions.

3.64 The state of emergency allowed the government to rule through decree bypassing parliament. It afforded legal, administrative, criminal and financial immunity to administrative authorities acting within the decree framework. In November 2016, the Supreme Court ruled decrees were not subject to judicial review.

3.65 The government issued 32 decrees under the state of emergency, giving it wide-ranging powers. These included the power to dismiss public servants linked to 'terrorist' organisations like the Gulen Movement, close institutions and organisations and remove judges. Human rights observers have expressed concern about decrees regulating matters unrelated to the state of emergency, from the closure of medical centres to the use of winter tyres on vehicles. Parliament has permanently adopted most of the decrees issued under the state of emergency.

3.66 The government again declared a three-month state of emergency following the February 2023 [earthquakes](#). During this period, it used laws against spreading 'disinformation' and making 'provocative posts' to censor social media posts criticising the government's response to the earthquake and temporarily banned Twitter, which survivors alleged hampered rescuers efforts to reach survivors.

## Gulen Movement

3.67 The Gulen Movement is a religious movement that began in Türkiye in the 1960s based on the sermons of Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, a onetime radical Islamist preacher who passed away in October 2024 while in exile in the United States. The movement, also known as *Cemaat* ('community') or *Hizmet* ('service'), transformed into a civil society movement involving religious, educational and social organisations. Its opponents, including former adherents, have expressed concerns about the movement's cult-like, secretive and undemocratic nature.


3.68 The Gulen Movement has a large international presence with supporters in 140 countries, including Australia. Prior to the July 2016 attempted coup, international observers estimated there were millions of Gulenists in Türkiye. While not openly involved in parliamentary politics, the movement was highly influential. In addition to schools, study centres and religious discussion centres, it ran businesses and media outlets, including a newswire, publishing company and several television channels.

3.69 From the early 1970s, Gulenists used their networks to place supporters in key government positions, including in the [police](#), [judiciary](#) and [intelligence services](#). For decades, Gulen and President Erdogan were politically aligned and membership of the Gulen Movement was not a crime (in-country sources reported membership of the Gulen Movement had been indirectly encouraged by the AKP given Erdogan's close relationship with Gulen).

3.70 Erdogan and Gulen fell out in 2013, after Gulenists spearheaded an [anti-corruption](#) campaign against several ministers. Erdogan's government began targeting institutions and individuals believed to be affiliated with the Gulen Movement, shutting media outlets and firing thousands of police officers. Türkiye issued an arrest warrant for Fethullah Gulen in 2014 and officially designated the Gulen Movement a terrorist organisation in May 2016. Gulenists are widely believed to have been a driving force behind the July 2016 attempted coup and the government immediately blamed Fethullah Gulen for its orchestration.

## Identification of accused Gulenists

3.71 Human rights observers have expressed concerns Türkiye's Government has not published clear criteria to link individuals to the Gulen Movement. In some cases, the only evidence of ties to the Gulen Movement has been use of the Bylock messaging application, which authorities claim was created exclusively for the Gulen Movement. Authorities have based other arrests and dismissals on: financial transactions with the Asya Bank (closed by the government for its alleged links with the Gulen Movement), membership of a trade union or association linked to



the movement, rapid promotion in the public service or military, having a child attend a school associated with the movement, undisclosed police or secret service reports, analysis of social media contacts and internet browsing history or information received from colleagues or neighbours. Many arrested were not provided the evidence against them or the opportunity to defend themselves. The Commission of Inquiry for State of Emergency Practices (see [Human Rights Framework](#)) was established to review dismissals but mostly upheld original decisions.

### **Treatment of accused Gulenists**

3.72 Under the state of emergency declared following the 2016 attempted coup, authorities conducted mass arrests and removed large numbers of suspected Gulenists from the civil service, [military](#), [police](#), [judiciary](#) and academia. In 2019, there were credible reports of disappearances and torture of alleged Gulenists who were former employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Turkish National Police denied the reports. According to the UK Government, as of July 2022, more than 100,000 people had been arrested for alleged links to the Gulen Movement. More than 330,000 had been detained, over 12,000 remained in prison and a further 67,000 remained under investigation. More than 130,000 civil servants had been dismissed from their positions and over 5,000 academics fired. A very small number of those dismissed or arrested were accused of participating in the attempted coup. Most were arrested based on their alleged membership of the movement and, for public servants for inappropriately obtaining public office.


3.73 Many of those arrested following the 2016 attempted coup were reportedly subjected to [torture](#) in custody. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch recorded instances of beatings, the use of stress positions, denial of food, water and medical care, mock executions, sexual assault and rape. Torture was generally carried out by police, often during interrogations in informal detention centres and sometimes under supervision of police doctors. Victims included judges, prosecutors, police, soldiers and other civil servants. Detainees were also subjected to other rights violations, including being denied access to (or a choice of) lawyers and being held for lengthy periods without charge. Under an emergency decree, ‘terrorist’ suspects could be held for up to 30 days without charge. There were also alleged instances of [enforced disappearance](#), including of Turkish nationals abroad who were forcibly returned to Türkiye (most recently in October 2024).

3.74 Authorities have published lists of those dismissed and marked them in the registration system of the state social insurance system (SGK), significantly reducing their chances of finding alternative employment in either the public or private sectors and stigmatising them socially. Those dismissed lose their income and social benefits, including access to medical insurance and retirement benefits. Many have their [passports](#) cancelled. Various decrees specifically state dismissed civil servants ‘shall be evicted from publicly-owned houses within 15 days’. Family members of alleged Gulenists have also been impacted, including through travel bans and/or passport confiscations, asset freezes and dismissal from public administration jobs.

3.75 In the immediate aftermath of the July 2016 coup, thousands of people were arrested or detained due to their use of the Bylock messaging application. In numerous cases, use of Bylock was the only evidence cited of alleged support for the Gulen Movement. In December 2017, the Ankara prosecutor’s office found nearly 11,500 people had been wrongly accused of using the Bylock application after being directed to Bylock servers without their knowledge by a separate application written by a Gulenist. The finding paved the way for the release of nearly 1,000 detainees.

3.76 Since July 2016, the government has seized, or appointed administrators for, approximately 1,000 businesses accused of links to the Gulen Movement including as recently as February 2025. A 2023 report by the Institute for Diplomacy and Economy, an NGO, found Turkish authorities had confiscated approximately USD50 billion in assets belonging to accused Gulenists since 2016, describing this as an ‘arbitrary and vengeful’ breach of property rights.

3.77 Mass arrests of suspected Gulenists continue to occur. For example, authorities arrested at least 650 people in January and February 2025. According to the Stockholm Center for Freedom, a Swedish-based NGO, in 2024, authorities conducted 4,902 operations against alleged Gulen members detaining 6,727 people and arresting 935. This includes the arrest in May 2024 of 14 high school students aged 13 to 17. Their charges reportedly hinged on sharing an apartment, participating in a study group and going to the movies together. In December 2023, over 400 police officers were suspended for alleged Gulenist connections. In-country sources said, like other people in Türkiye who were arrested, suspected Gulenists were still sometimes beaten by police or subjected to other forms of mistreatment, although ‘extreme’ torture was now much less common.



3.78 The experience of those purged has not been universal. Some purged officials have been re-appointed to senior positions, others have thrived in the private sector. In-country sources said legal mechanisms existed for accused Gulenists to be politically rehabilitated or have their names cleared, especially if their links to the Gulen Movement had been tenuous or incidental, such as merely having downloaded the Bylock application. The same sources emphasised these processes were arbitrary, time-consuming and not always successful. When DFAT sought to interview accused Gulenists in the process of clearing their names they declined, citing fears of jeopardising their appeals.

3.79 Turkish nationals living abroad with suspected links to the Gulen Movement may have their activities monitored and surveilled, especially where they have a high profile and established record of supporting the Gulen Movement. Monitoring may occur [online](#) or physically, including by persons acting for, or on behalf of, the Turkish state. Nordic Monitor, an NGO based outside Türkiye, reported in May 2021 an Australian national of Turkish descent associated with a prominent Gulen-linked organisation was monitored on behalf of the Turkish state during a private meeting at an Australian university in 2019. According to Turkish Monitor, the individual faced arrest if they returned to Türkiye.

3.80 The Turkish Government has committed to pursue and repatriate suspected Gulenists living abroad and frequently requests the extradition of high-profile individuals. At the time of writing, DFAT was not aware of suspected Gulenists residing in Western countries, including Australia, being extradited to Türkiye. There have been instances of Turkish nationals with suspected links to the Gulen Movement living abroad being abducted and forcibly returned to Türkiye (see [Enforced Disappearances](#)).

3.81 DFAT assesses those accused of membership of the Gulen Movement face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of arrest, prosecution and physical abuse while in detention. This may be justified if credible evidence exists individuals were involved in the July 2016 attempted coup, or inappropriately obtained or misused public office. In other instances, the burden of proof for membership of the Gulen Movement does not meet credible evidentiary standards, particularly given mere membership of the Gulen Movement was not illegal prior to the 2016 coup attempt and accused have limited ability to defend themselves. Civil servants accused of membership are highly likely to face dismissal without due process and face numerous other sanctions. Access to recourse is slow. DFAT assesses those accused of membership of the Gulen Movement face a high risk of societal discrimination, including stigma and through the publication of their names.

## **Opposition politicians and supporters**


3.82 Türkiye retains a lively and contested political scene, despite the AKP Government's use of a range of legal and political tools to try to gain an advantage over its opponents. One example is the relative success of opposition parties in 2024 local government elections. Nevertheless, opposition politicians and their supporters face a range of challenges and restrictions, including in relation to their freedom of expression, association and assembly.

3.83 Arrest and imprisonment of opposition politicians is not uncommon, particularly those belonging to the [DEM](#) and [CHP](#). In January 2025, Umit Ozdag, leader of the Zafer (Victory) Party, was arrested on charges of 'insulting the President' and 'inciting hatred and enmity among the public' following comments criticising President Erdogan's leadership. This was followed in March 2025 by the arrest of CHP Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu on a broad suite of corruption charges, which led to widespread [protests](#).

## **Kurdish-backed political parties (DEM/HDP)**

3.84 Political parties representing [Kurdish](#) interests have traditionally faced strong opposition from the Turkish state and many pro-Kurdish parties have been declared illegal for allegedly supporting the PKK. From 2012 to 2018, the main political voice for Kurds was the left-wing People's Democratic Party (HDP). After the government-initiated closure proceedings against HDP in 2021, the party regrouped under the banner of the DEM party, which won 57 seats in the 2023 general election and 82 mayorships (out of 1,400) in the 2024 local elections.

3.85 Like other pro-Kurdish parties, DEM and HDP have faced strong pressure from Türkiye's Government over their alleged support for the PKK. In 2016, Parliament lifted the parliamentary privileges of opposition politicians accused by the government of being 'terrorists', resulting in dozens of HDP MPs having their seats revoked and many being imprisoned. In March 2021, the Chief Public Prosecutor filed a case calling for the closure of the HDP Party on



the grounds of alleged ‘terror links’ and for the banning of 451 current and former HDP MPs from politics. In April 2023, HDP announced it would not submit a defence and instead switched to running its candidates under the banner of the Green Left Party (YSP), which later became the DEM Party.

3.86 In 2024, former HDP leader, Selahattin Demirtas, was sentenced to 42 years in prison for fomenting deadly protests in 2014 against an attack by Islamic State on the Kurdish town of Kobani in northern Syria. Demirtas and his supporters maintain the charges are politically motivated. A resolution of the EU Parliament in 2021 noted around 4,000 HDP members, including several MPs, remained in prison. Almost 3,000 people affiliated with the DEM party were detained in 2023 and 319 were arrested.

3.87 In-country sources reported HDP and DEM politicians had been physically attacked in Parliament without consequence to those who assaulted them. DEM politicians and their supporters had also been assaulted and beaten at public gatherings, including peaceful protests and press conferences. No one was held responsible for these attacks. In-country sources said children of senior HDP and DEM leaders had been refused employment in the civil service on the basis of their family’s political ties.

3.88 Several in-country sources told DFAT DEM MPs who reached the ends of their terms were faced with a choice between ‘prison or exile’ once they no longer had parliamentary immunity. Former HDP MPs have fled overseas to escape politically-motivated charges.

3.89 In September 2016, Türkiye’s Government adopted a decree permitting it to appoint ‘trustees’ in lieu of elected mayors, deputy mayors, or members of municipal councils suspended on charges of terrorism. This decree was used in southeastern Türkiye after the 2019 municipal elections, again after the 2024 elections and continued into 2025. As of February 2025, 12 mayors belonging to opposition parties elected during local elections in March 2024 had been removed and replaced by government-appointed trustees. This includes the DEM Mayor of Hakkari, suspended and sentenced to 20 years in prison for alleged links to the PKK in June 2024 and the DEM Mayor of Kagizman Municipality, imprisoned for six years in February 2025 for membership of an armed terrorist organisation. In-country Kurdish sources described the appointment of trustees as a serious impediment to Kurds exercising their political right to choose their own representatives.


3.90 DFAT assesses like other politically active Kurds, members of Kurdish-backed political parties face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of politically motivated charges and a low risk of official violence in the form of the use of excessive force by [police](#) in response to political gatherings.

### **Republican People’s Party (CHP)**

3.91 Like other opposition parties, members of the CHP Party have faced a range of attempts by Türkiye’s Government to silence and discredit them, including the use of defamation charges and police crackdowns on peaceful public political expression. In-country sources told DFAT CHP politicians were often refused permission to hold events in public spaces, even on matters such as animal welfare and when they did hold rallies, police often used excessive force to disperse them. The practice of replacing democratically elected mayors with government-appointed trustees on the basis of ‘terrorism investigations’, usually reserved for members of [Kurdish-backed political parties](#), has also recently been used against the CHP.

3.92 CHP politicians have faced criminal charges for legitimate political activities. DFAT is aware of one CHP MP facing 15 separate cases brought by the government, with the AKP attempting to use its numbers in parliament to force a vote on revoking their parliamentary immunity. Such pressures created an atmosphere of self-censorship, according to in-country sources. These sources said relatives of CHP leaders were denied jobs in the civil service based on their family’s political affiliations.

3.93 Since local elections in March 2024, several CHP mayors, including Ahmet Ozer, a [Kurd](#), have been detained, along with a number of municipal council members belonging to the CHP (Ozer was arrested on terrorism charges). President Erdogan’s main political rival, Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, was arrested in March 2025 on corruption charges, days before he was selected as the CHP’s presidential candidate for elections due in 2028 (Imamoglu is technically ineligible to run following the ‘invalidation’ of his university diploma by Istanbul University). International media and Human Rights Watch reported over 100 people connected to Imamoglu, including mayors of two Istanbul districts, were arrested simultaneously. CHP claims the arrests are politically motivated and designed to undermine its electoral prospects.



3.94 Rank-and-file CHP members have also been arrested while participating in non-violent public [protests](#) and rallies. Four members of CHP's youth wing were arrested in March 2024 in Izmir for insulting the President after painting graffiti depicting President Erdogan. CHP members have been arrested for rallying alongside the 'Saturday Mothers' group, a group of women protesting against the disappearance of their relatives since 1995. In general, according to in-country sources, rank-and-file members were more likely to be arrested or face police violence than party leaders.

3.95 DFAT assesses members of non-Kurdish opposition parties, including the CHP, face an overall moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of defamation suits and other legal action. DFAT assesses members of non-Kurdish opposition parties, including the CHP, face a low risk of official violence in the form of excessive use of force by police in response to political gatherings.

## Protesters

3.96 Article 34 of the Constitution guarantees the right to hold unarmed, peaceful meetings and demonstrations without prior permission but provides for this right to be restricted on the grounds of national security and public order. Under the state of emergency and subsequent legislative normalisation, this freedom was severely restricted, particularly when exercised by groups protesting against the government. According to Articles 9 and 11 of the *State of Emergency Law* (2016), measures could be taken during the state of emergency to prohibit, postpone or require permission for assemblies and demonstrations in closed and open areas, as well as to determine, publicise, supervise, and disperse areas of assemblies and demonstrations.

3.97 The *Law on Demonstrations and Meetings* (1983) requires all members of a protest organising committee to submit a signed declaration to the district governor's office 48 hours prior to the event. The *Law Amending the Law on Powers and Duties of the Police, Other Laws and Decrees* (2015) allows police to detain any protester without consulting the prosecutor's office and imposes a five year prison sentence on protesters who cover their faces fully or partially during a demonstration.

3.98 As of 2024, Türkiye's Government continued to prohibit many demonstrations on national security grounds, often detaining people likely to be involved before scheduled protests commenced. Istanbul's Taksim Square has been closed for demonstrations since the 2013 Gezi Park protests, notwithstanding a 2023 Constitutional Court decision which found such bans violated constitutionally protected rights.

3.99 During elections, the AKP and main opposition CHP are generally permitted to hold large public gatherings but the Kurdish DEM and minor parties are usually prohibited from holding rallies. Large public protests were held countrywide in March 2025, following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu (see [CHP](#)). Police used water cannon and tear gas to disperse crowds, in some cases this was in response to clear provocation but in others evidence of provocation was lacking.

3.100 According to Türkiye's Human Rights Association (IHD), security forces intervened in 256 meetings and demonstrations in 2023 (latest figures available), bringing 56 cases against 1,254 people. More than 200 people were arrested during Labour Day demonstrations in Istanbul in May 2024. At least 15 people were arrested during banned LGBTQIA+ Pride marches in June 2024. Police have used force, including pepper spray and tear gas, to break up International Women's Day marches in Istanbul, including in 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023. International Women's Day marches have proceeded in other parts of the country without incident.

3.101 Multiple in-country sources told DFAT police commonly used excessive force when confronting and apprehending protesters, even when protesters were non-violent and did not resist arrest. DFAT met several in-country sources who reported incurring serious injuries, and in one case, permanent disability, as a result of police violence toward protesters. No action was taken against the police in these cases. The IHD recorded 3,487 cases of protesters being 'beaten and wounded' by police in 2023.

3.102 DFAT assesses protesters who attempt to demonstrate against government policies or over 'sensitive' social issues, such as the rights of [women](#) or [LGBTQIA+](#) people, face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of arbitrary arrests and a moderate risk of official violence in the form of excessive force by police responders. Previous participation in protests alone is unlikely to draw ongoing attention or harassment from authorities.

## Media and Journalists (including social media)

3.103 Several constitutional articles guarantee freedom of expression and of the media. Article 26 states citizens have the right to express and disseminate their thoughts and opinions by speech, in writing or in pictures, or through other media. This right includes the freedom to receive and impart information and ideas without interference from official authorities. Article 28 states the press is free and shall not be censored, and the state shall take necessary measures to ensure freedom of the press and freedom of information. Clauses in both articles, however, provide for the restriction of these rights on national security grounds, the maintenance of public order and territorial integrity. Exemptions in the *Criminal Code* (2004), criminal defamation laws and anti-terrorism legislation significantly limit the ability of journalists to express views critical of the government or covering sensitive subjects.

3.104 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), an NGO, has reported a steady deterioration in media freedom in Türkiye over the past decade. RSF ranked Türkiye 159 out of 180 countries in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index. According to RSF, since Erdogan became President in 2014, Türkiye has imprisoned 131 journalists and charged 77 with insulting the President. Five journalists were killed over the same period. Judicial harassment of journalists reportedly remains widespread. According to domestic media, 58 journalists were sentenced to a total of 135 years' imprisonment in 2024, with an additional 26 journalists arrested. Local NGOs reported at least nine journalists were arrested, six sentenced to prison, five detained and 23 investigated as a result of their work in January 2025. In March 2025, at least seven journalists covering anti-government protests were detained on a variety of charges. Over 90 per cent of media is either under the direct control of Türkiye's Government or government-aligned entities.


3.105 According to in-country sources and international observers, Türkiye's Government sometimes cancels media licenses, issues fines and withholds advertising contracts from media outlets critical of the government. According to RSF, since the 2016 attempted coup, 160 media outlets have been forced to close, many for alleged links to the [Gülen Movement](#) or [pro-Kurdish](#) editorial positions. In 2024, the broadcasting regulator revoked the license of Acik Radyo, an independent radio station, after a guest referred to the suffering endured during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. In March 2025 Türkiye's Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) issued a 10-day suspension to the opposition-aligned Sozcu TV channel in response to its live broadcasts of protests, which RTUK said 'incited hatred and enmity among the public'. Writers and publishers have also faced prosecution for defamation, denigration, obscenity, separatism, terrorism, subversion, fundamentalism and insulting religious values.

3.106 Journalists have been charged under [counter-terrorism](#) laws against 'spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation' or 'exposing a counter-terrorist official to the threat of terrorist organisations', or under [criminal defamation laws](#) against 'insulting a public official', 'insulting the President', 'denigrating state institutions' or 'disseminating false information'. In-country sources told DFAT journalists were targeted for criticism of the government, attendance at demonstrations or political rallies, or expressing left-wing or pro-Kurdish views. In January 2025, three journalists were charged with 'disseminating misleading information' and 'spreading terrorist propaganda' after social media posts regarding the alleged killing of journalists by Türkiye in Syria. In November 2024, authorities launched an investigation into two journalists for spreading disinformation about the forced resignation of three lawmakers belonging to a far-right political party. According to in-country sources, while many journalists accused of wrongdoing are released on bail and eventually acquitted, the inconvenience and stress caused by their trials is a strong incentive to self-censor.

3.107 Emblematic cases include Erdal Susem and Mehmet Baransu. Susem, the publisher of a left-wing culture magazine, was charged in 2010 with weapons offences and creating propaganda for the banned Turkish Maoist Communist Party. Susem denies the charges but is serving a life sentence. Baransu, a newspaper columnist, was charged in 2020 with membership of a terrorist organisation, 'violation of secrecy' and 'revealing forbidden information' because of stories he wrote in 2010 revealing an alleged coup plot. Baransu is serving a sentence of 19 years and 6 months. In July 2023, the ECHR ordered Türkiye pay Baransu AUD16,800 in compensation for violation of his right to trial within a reasonable period.

### Treatment of Kurdish journalists

3.108 Türkiye's Government has targeted journalists working with Kurdish-language outlets. It has also targeted Kurdish media institutions, including following the 2016 attempted coup when emergency decrees closed nearly all



private Kurdish-language newspapers, television channels and radio stations on national security grounds. Authorities have prosecuted or detained journalists currently or formerly affiliated with Kurdish outlets for alleged links with the PKK or ‘spreading terrorist propaganda’. Some have been imprisoned for a year or more. Journalists in the southeast who have criticised the PKK or expressed support for the government have faced intimidation and threats from the PKK.

3.109 Many Kurdish journalists, particularly those working in the southeast, have reported threats, physical violence and criminal investigations by state authorities. Around 2016, a Kurdish journalist suffered long-term serious injuries after her car was rammed by a police car in Diyarbakir allegedly deliberately. No one was held accountable for the incident. On another occasion, a group of Kurdish journalists were detained by police while attempting to cover a local political event. In-country sources told DFAT the group was beaten, threatened with guns and forced to stand in the hot sun. In-country sources told DFAT such treatment was ‘routine’ for Kurdish journalists working in the southeast. A Turkish drone strike reportedly killed two Kurdish journalists in northern Syria in December 2024 (police later arrested 30 people [protesting](#) the killings in Istanbul, including 20 journalists).

### Online media


3.110 Türkiye’s Government attempts to exercise wide-ranging control over what people in the country can see and do online. Freedom House, an NGO, has ranked Türkiye as ‘not free’ in its annual *Freedom on the Net* report since 2013. Key issues include the blocking and throttling (intentional slowing) of websites, criminal prosecution of internet users for critical speech and government-backed disinformation campaigns.

3.111 The *Internet Law* (2007) allows authorities to restrict access to internet content and telecommunications networks and to monitor individuals’ online activities. Amendments to the law passed in August 2020 require social media companies with more than 1 million users to establish offices in Türkiye and respond to court orders to block or remove content within 24 hours. These laws were used in the leadup to the 2023 general election, for example to suspend the Twitter accounts of Muhammed Yakut, a Kurdish businessman critical of Erdogan’s regime and Cevheri Guven, an investigative [journalist](#). In 2022, amendments to the *Internet Law* (2007), *Press Law* (2004) and *Criminal Code* (2004) made ‘disseminating false information’ a criminal offence punishable by one to three years in prison and increased the potential punishments for internet companies for failing to comply with notices to takedown content or provide user data on request.

3.112 Türkiye has blocked or slowed the speed of several websites for failure to comply with takedown orders or to suppress the spread of ‘disinformation’ following major events. For example, access to social media platforms was blocked following terrorist attacks in Istanbul in November 2023 (see [Security Situation](#)), and ‘X’ (formerly Twitter) and other online services were blocked for eight hours following the February 2023 [earthquakes](#). At various times, authorities have ordered the blocking of sites including Wikipedia, Instagram, X and Eksi Sozluk (a popular local editable dictionary) for periods ranging from one week to several years. In 2024, Türkiye banned Discord, a messaging and video app, to ‘protect children from cyberbullying and exploitation’. Another popular messaging and video platform, Tango, was banned in January 2025.

3.113 In-country sources told DFAT the government supported online disinformation, propaganda and trolling campaigns, including against journalists and activists who criticised the government. Since the 2016 attempted coup, local and international media outlets and human rights observers have reported the existence of a government-funded network of online provocateurs known as ‘Ak-trolls’. According to a 2020 report by the Stanford Internet Observatory, since 2016, Ak-trolls have established thousands of fake accounts to re-tweet government propaganda and attack government opponents. In June 2020, Twitter removed 7,340 inauthentic accounts responsible for around 37 million tweets, which it said were operated by the youth wing of the AKP. Ak-trolls and other pro-government online activists have allegedly engaged in death threats and smear campaigns against opposition figures, as well as sexual harassment and threats against female journalists and activists.

3.114 In-country sources told DFAT citizen journalists, bloggers and other individuals who criticised the government online faced similar risks to professional journalists, including arrest under [counter-terrorism](#) and [criminal defamation](#) laws. In July 2024 LGBTQIA+ activist, Iris Mozalar, was arrested for ‘inciting hatred and enmity and insulting the public’ after criticising racist attacks against Syrian refugees. In August 2024, a woman was arrested for ‘inciting hatred and insulting the President’ after she criticised the government’s temporary ban on Instagram



after Instagram removed posts expressing condolences over the death of a leader of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. In-country sources told DFAT Türkiye's Government actively monitored social media for critical speech but it was 'a bit random' whether someone came to police attention for a given post. In March 2025, immediately following the arrest of President Erdogan's chief political rival, Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu (see [CHP](#)), authorities restricted access to social media platforms and detained over 30 people for making 'provocative' social media posts about Imamoglu's detention. The Interior Minister claimed the posts had the potential to incite public hatred and hostility (a criminal offence) and flagged more social media users would be arrested on these grounds.

3.115 Suspected [Gulenists](#) living abroad may have their online activities monitored, particularly if they are known to belong or are sympathetic to the Gulen Movement. High profile individuals and/or those with an established record of posting material in support of the Gulen Movement are most likely to have their online activities monitored. Suspected Gulenists may face adverse attention, including arrest and potential prosecution, should they return to Türkiye. DFAT is not aware of returnees from Australia with suspected links to the Gulen Movement being arrested because of their online activities while in Australia.

3.116 DFAT assesses journalists who criticise Türkiye's Government or report on 'sensitive' topics such as the rights of [Kurds](#), refugees or [LGBTQIA+](#) people face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of criminal charges and occasional detention. They face a low risk of official violence in the form of excessive force by [police](#) and mistreatment or [torture](#) in detention. They face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of online attacks by pro-government trolls. Kurdish journalists face a high risk of official discrimination and a moderate risk of official violence. Citizen journalists, bloggers and other individuals who criticise the government online face similar risks to professional journalists.


## Human Rights Defenders

3.117 Governance of civil society organisations is regulated under the *Law on Associations and the Law of Foundations* (2004), as well as the *Civil Code* (1926). Article 33 of the Constitution guarantees the right to form associations but allows for restrictions of this right on national security grounds. Civil society organisations are also affected by legislation concerning money laundering and terrorist financing, which in some cases interferes with their ability to raise funds in Türkiye and abroad.

3.118 As of July 2024, there were over 100,000 associations and 6,000 registered foundations in Türkiye, working across a wide range of sectors, including social services, [education](#), [health](#), vocational training, sport and [religion](#). Around 1.5 per cent are involved in human rights advocacy according to the Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society. While many uncontroversial organisations work without undue interference and, in some cases, receive government support, organisations that criticise the government or work on topics considered 'sensitive', such as the rights of [Kurds](#), [women](#) or [LGBTQIA+](#) people, have faced judicial harassment, threats and closures.

3.119 Following the 2016 attempted coup, more than 1,500 organisations were permanently closed including human rights and humanitarian groups, lawyers' associations and trade unions. While the frequency of closures has slowed, civil society organisations continue to be targeted by authorities for defending human rights. A 2023 report by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) detailed closure cases against four organisations: the Religious Scholars Mutual Aid and Solidarity Association (DIAYDER, an organisation of Kurdish imams), targeted under counter-terrorism legislation for alleged links to the PKK; the Migration Monitoring Association (GOCIZDER, which advocated for the rights of forcibly displaced communities); the We Will Stop Femicides Platform (KCDP); and the Tarlabasi Community Center (TTM, which provided support services for deprived communities in the Tarlabasi district of Istanbul). According to FIDH-OMCT, these closures caused severe emotional distress for the officials of the organisations involved and disrupted the services they offered. In October 2024, a court sentenced 16 members of DIAYDER, including its chair, for being members of and aiding an illegal organisation, with prison terms ranging from two to seven years (six people were acquitted). DIAYDER's offices have been sealed since 2022. The TTM's premises were sealed in October 2024. A court ordered the closure of GOCIZDER in December 2024. The case against KCDP was dismissed in September 2023.

3.120 Besides targeting civil society organisations, Türkiye's Government has prosecuted individual human rights defenders for alleged membership in terrorist organisations, including the [Gulen Movement](#) and the [PKK](#). Prominent examples include human rights activist and philanthropist Osman Kavala, detained in October 2017 after being



accused of participating in a plot to overthrow the government. He was acquitted in February 2020, only to be re-arrested on the same day on espionage charges in an effort to sidestep an order by the ECHR to release him. Kavala was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in April 2022. A ruling by the ECHR in November 2022 again called for his release, ordered he be paid compensation and reprimanded Türkiye for failing to abide by the ECHR's earlier decision. At the time of writing, Kavala remained in prison.

3.121 In July 2020, Amnesty International's Taner Kilic was convicted of membership of a 'terror organisation' and sentenced to more than six years in prison. Three other prominent human rights activists were convicted of terrorism offences alongside him, although their convictions were overturned in 2023. Kilic was acquitted and released in February 2025. In November 2024, Nimet Tanrikulu (a founding member of IHD) and eight others were detained and subsequently indicted for 'membership of a terrorist organisation'. Tanrikulu's charges related to historic travel and participation in civil society events relating to Kurdish human rights issues during the 2013-14 peace process between the Turkish Government and the PKK.

3.122 Security forces closely monitor activities of groups defending the rights of religious and cultural minorities, women, trade unionists and the LGBTQIA+ community. Aside from criminal prosecutions, many human rights defenders report official harassment, surveillance, intimidation, threats, prolonged detention without charge and travel bans. Lawyers who provide legal assistance to human rights defenders and other civil society activists face similar treatment.

3.123 DFAT assesses human rights defenders face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of monitoring, harassment, arrest, prosecution and being prevented from travelling abroad. This is particularly the case for those working on topics deemed 'sensitive', including the rights of religious and ethnic minorities (especially Kurds), refugees, women and LGBTQIA+ people.

## GROUPS OF INTEREST


### Women

3.124 In the early years of the republic, Türkiye was a regional leader in recognising the social and political rights of women. Women's rights to equality in marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance have been recognised since the 1920s. Women's right to vote and stand for parliament was recognised in 1934.

3.125 Women participate in almost all areas of public life including politics, business, the security forces, sport, media and the arts. Nevertheless, significant social, cultural and religious barriers remain to gender equality in Türkiye and men generally dominate positions of power. Women in Türkiye reportedly suffered from gender-based discrimination and violence and despite a relatively progressive legal environment and historical recognition of gender equality, state protection for women was not always available or effective.

3.126 Article 10 of the Constitution states all individuals are equal without discrimination before the law, regardless of sex. A 2004 amendment added the state has an obligation to ensure women and men have equal rights in practice. Women enjoy considerable legal protection in many areas including personal safety, participation in the workforce and mandatory schooling for girls. However, some discriminatory clauses persist. Article 287 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) on genital examinations allows a judge or prosecutor to authorise virginity testing, even if the subject does not consent. A law which would have allowed men accused of having sex with girls under 18 to escape punishment by marrying them, dubbed by critics the 'marry your rapist bill', was introduced into parliament in 2016 and again in 2020, but was defeated both times.

3.127 Women are generally underrepresented in politics and positions of leadership. At the 2023 elections, 121 female MPs were elected to the 600-seat Turkish parliament. Only one of the government's 18 current Cabinet ministers is a woman. In the 2024 local government elections, the number of women mayors rose to 11 out of 81, helped by the DEM party's policy of running male and female candidates as 'co-mayors'. The World Economic Forum's 2024 *Global Gender Gap* index rated Türkiye 127<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries. Türkiye's rate of economic participation for women is among the lowest in Europe at 35 per cent in 2024, compared to 72 per cent for men. In-country sources said this reflected social norms emphasising women's importance as homemakers and mothers over them becoming wage earners.



3.128 Child, early and forced marriage has declined in recent years but still occurs. According to UNFPA data from 2018, around one per cent of girls are married by age 15 and 15 per cent are married by age 18 (underage marriage for boys is much less common). In-country sources told DFAT marriages of girls as young as 10 sometimes occurred in highly religious communities, including in urban areas and were not reported until the girl attended hospital to give birth. Child marriage is also reportedly common in some Syrian refugee communities. In September 2024, a court sentenced a member of the Ismailaga religious community to 36 years in prison for marrying a six-year old girl. The girl's father, who consented to the marriage, received 18 years and nine months for accessory to sexual abuse.

3.129 Grounds for divorce include the breakdown of marriage, separation, mutual consent, mental illness, adultery, cruelty, desertion (for a period exceeding six months), criminal conviction and addiction. Turkish law does not permit joint custody of children. Courts typically grant the mother custody of an infant child. Judges determine child support according to the financial situations of the parents and the child's age and needs. Child maintenance automatically ceases when the child turns 18.

### **Gender-based violence**

3.130 Gender-based and family violence is widespread in both urban and rural areas. More than 1.4 million women reported being subjected to domestic violence between January 2013 and July 2024. Regional variations exist, with studies finding women in Northeast Anatolia were most likely to experience intimate-partner violence.


3.131 In-country sources cited femicide, the intentional killing of woman and girls on account of their gender, as a major concern. While the per capita rate of femicide in Türkiye is lower than the global average, it is higher than many European countries. According to the Federation of Women's Associations of Türkiye, 421 femicides occurred in 2024. Similar numbers have been reported for at least the last decade. KCDP, a local NGO, reported most perpetrators were close male relatives or current or ex-boyfriends.

3.132 The *Law on the Prevention of Violence against Women and the Protection of the Family* (2012) provides for orders aimed at protecting 'the women, the children, the family members and the victims of stalking, who have been subject to the violence or at the risk of violence'. More than 10,000 such orders were issued in 2022. In-country sources and international observers have criticised these orders as ineffective and weakly enforced. In-country sources pointed out many victims of femicide in recent years were killed despite having active protection orders against their murderers.

3.133 In March 2021, Türkiye announced it would withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the 'Istanbul Convention', which it signed in 2012. In denouncing the convention, Türkiye's Government cited concerns it would increase divorce rates and 'obliterate the family' and claimed references to sexual orientation and gender identity in the convention would 'normalise homosexuality'. In-country sources told DFAT Türkiye leaving the Istanbul Convention emboldened perpetrators of violence against women. In-country sources also said lenient sentences for men who beat, raped or murdered women created a culture of impunity for gender-based violence.

3.134 In-country sources said reporting rates for domestic abuse were low, as cultural norms and economic dependence discouraged many women from reporting abuse. While some women were supported by relatives to leave abusive relationships, others were encouraged to stay 'for the good of the family'. In-country sources told DFAT when women did report abuse, police were often reluctant to file charges and instead encouraged the victim to reconcile with her abuser. However, according to in-country sources, in cases where the woman insisted on making a complaint or received serious physical injury, police did press charges. Some abusers went to prison but others escaped punishment or received lenient sentences on grounds such as 'good behaviour'.

3.135 A small number of so-called 'honour killings' occur in Türkiye each year. While accurate figures were unavailable at the time of writing, NGOs reported between one and 31 'honour killings' in Türkiye in 2019. Honour killings in Türkiye are defined as a murder committed or ordered to punish a family member believed to have damaged the family's reputation. Actions considered damaging can include extramarital sex, refusal of an arranged marriage, choosing one's own spouse without family approval, becoming a victim of rape, same-sex sexual acts (see [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)) or liberal behaviour and dress. Defence of honour is not considered a mitigating factor by Turkish courts. Individuals convicted of honour killings can be sentenced to life imprisonment but in-country sources said judges often gave lenient sentences in cases of honour killings on the grounds of



‘provocation’ or ‘good behaviour’. In February 2025, a court handed a reduced sentence to a man who killed his daughter-in-law on the grounds he was ‘provoked’.

3.136 A woman’s ability to relocate to escape an abuser depends on a variety of factors, including her degree of financial independence and whether she has a network of family and friends in the new location. While large cities can offer a degree of anonymity, in-country sources said social media had made it easier for abusers to track their victims, making it difficult to escape highly motivated abusers. There have been cases of femicides and honour killings being committed months or even years after the victim relocated and took steps to conceal their whereabouts from their abuser.

3.137 According to local media and NGO reporting, there are 145 women’s shelters across Türkiye, with the ability to accommodate around 3,500 women. Most are run by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services. In-country sources described the number of places in these shelters as adequate but said living conditions in them were ‘very bad’. A number of well-run shelters in the southeast were reportedly closed following the takeover of their municipalities by government-appointed trustees (see [Political Opinion](#)), reducing the options for women in that region to leave abusive relationships.

3.138 Türkiye’s Government operates Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres (SONİM) in all 81 provinces, offering health, legal and psychosocial support for victims of gender-based violence. It also operates a 24/7 domestic violence hotline and a smartphone application (Women’s Emergency Support Application) allowing victims of abuse to instantly report it to the nearest police station. As of January 2025, almost 8 million women had downloaded the application since its launch in 2018, and assistance had been provided to 920,000 women who reported violence through the application. According to in-country sources, illiteracy and disempowerment were barriers to accessing these services for some women.


3.139 There were widespread reports of gender-based violence, harassment and intimidation of [Kurdish](#) women during the 2015 to 2016 ‘urban fighting’ between PKK-backed militants and Turkish security forces in southeastern Turkish cities including Cizre, Silopi, Idil and Sur. A July 2016 CEDAW report noted many Kurdish women were displaced during this period and faced difficulties accessing housing, education and health services and an increased risk of sexual and other violence. CEDAW documented allegations of harassment, sexual violence and threats against Kurdish women. According to in-country sources, during this conflict security forces shared naked pictures of raped or killed civilian and militant women on social media as a means of intimidation. In June 2023, two soldiers in Van Province were convicted of raping an Afghan woman during the deportation of a group of asylum seekers to Iran (they received prison sentences of over 30 years).

3.140 DFAT assesses Turkish women face a moderate risk of societal violence in the form of domestic violence. In rare cases, this can extend to femicide or honour killings. Kurdish women residing in the southeast face a low risk of conflict-related violence, although this can vary during active security operations. While state protection mechanisms exist, enforcement is often weak and may provide limited or no protection against a highly motivated abuser.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.141 No legislation in Türkiye prohibits sexual activity between people of the same sex. The legal age of consent for all sexual acts is 18 years, including between people of the same sex. Transgender people can legally change gender, although a court must first grant permission based on a medical report. Legal gender reassignment is conditional upon the individual remaining unmarried and undergoing surgery and sterilisation. There is no legislative protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in social institutions, government offices or corporations. There are no provisions for same-sex marriage or civil unions, meaning same-sex couples do not have access to associated benefits with regard to retirement, inheritance, insurance, social security and access to the corpse in case of death.

3.142 The US Department of State reported in 2023 police sometimes used laws such as ‘offences against public morality’, ‘protection of the family’ and ‘unnatural sexual behaviour’ to justify harassment of LGBTQIA+ people. Police reportedly sometimes use traffic laws to harass transgender sex workers, including to extract bribes. Police have also used licensing and other laws to harass and close LGBTQIA+ venues. No specific legislation prohibits hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ people. Article 29 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) allows for the mitigation of sentences, including for assault or murder, in cases of provocation by an ‘unjust act’. Human rights groups claim judges have



used Article 29 to mitigate sentences of men who murdered trans sex workers they later claimed had misrepresented themselves as cisgender women.

### **Societal treatment of LGBTQIA+ people**

3.143 Despite a liberal legal framework, many parts of Turkish society remain deeply conservative with regard to LGBTQIA+ issues. Some surveys have shown a softening of attitudes. For example, a 2020 poll survey by Kadir Has University reported 45 per cent of respondents believed LGBTQIA+ people should have equal rights, up from 33 per cent in 2019. Another survey conducted in 2020 by the UCLA Law School found 43 per cent of people believed transgender people were ‘violating the traditions’ of Turkish culture.

3.144 Pro-government media and high-level officials, including President Erdogan, frequently make negative comments and statements about LGBTQIA+ lifestyles and behaviours. Ahead of the 2023 general election, President Erdogan told a campaign rally his government was ‘against LGBT’, which he linked to a breakdown in family values. In September 2023, the National Education Minister announced an optional course had been added to the school curriculum, The Family in Turkish Society, to ‘fight’ homosexuality. Speaking in January 2025 to the AKP’s Youth Wing, President Erdogan said his declaration of 2025 as the Year of the Family was a ‘protective measure’ against ‘LGBT perversion’, which was spreading worldwide ‘like a plague’ and threatening family values. The head of the *Diyanet* has said homosexuality brings disease, while a *Diyanet* official blamed the 2023 [earthquakes](#) on LGBTQIA+ people incurring God’s wrath.


3.145 In-country sources reported few gay men and lesbian women were ‘out’ to their family and colleagues, with many fearing rejection and ostracisation if their sexual orientation were revealed. Parents who learned their children were LGBTQIA+ sometimes evicted them from home or refused to support them financially. Bullying of LGBTQIA+ students is reportedly common in schools and universities, leading many to drop out. In-country sources told DFAT some medical workers discriminated against LGBTQIA+ people and sometimes refused or deprioritised their treatment. In-country sources also said trans women (individuals born male who identify or present as women) were especially likely to experience discrimination due to their visibility, while trans men (individuals born female who identify or present as men) were less likely to experience discrimination provided they could ‘pass’ as cisgender men.

3.146 Turkish employment law allows the dismissal of government employees found ‘to act in a shameful and embarrassing way unfit for the position of a civil servant’, while other statutes criminalise the undefined practice of ‘unchastity’. Human rights observers report employers have used these provisions to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ individuals. In-country sources told DFAT trans women in particular faced employment discrimination due to their visibility and many could only find work in the sex industry.

3.147 LGBTQIA+ people live openly and safely in wealthier neighbourhoods in major cities, particularly Istanbul. However, in-country sources told DFAT these spaces were shrinking and some previously ‘gay-friendly’ neighbourhoods had become more conservative. LGBTQIA+ people living in poorer and rural areas, such as central Anatolia, are less likely to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity because of prevailing conservative attitudes. Both gay men and lesbian women face considerable social pressure to enter into heterosexual marriages and produce children.

3.148 Street violence and harassment sometimes occurs against LGBTQIA+ people in Türkiye. Kaos GL, an LGBTQIA+ organisation, reported alleged hate crimes and ill-treatment, including physical assaults, against LGBTQIA+ people in 2023. Harassment and oral abuse are also common. According to human rights observers and in-country sources, police often react to alleged crimes against LGBTQIA+ people with indifference or hostility, even in cases of serious assaults. One in-country source told DFAT authorities sometimes engaged street gangs to intimidate and evict LGBTQIA+ people from certain areas of cities, although DFAT was unable to confirm this. LGBTQIA+ members of refugee communities are reportedly at particular risk of harassment, violence and deportation. In a small number of cases, police have acted to uphold the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.

3.149 Authorities have cracked down on public displays of support for LGBTQIA+ causes. While there are several prominent LGBTQIA+ NGOs across Türkiye, many report pressure from authorities and Islamist groups to cease their activities. Authorities are reported to use onerous audit procedures to harass LGBTQIA+ organisations and threaten them with closure. In-country sources said organisations have taken steps to downsize and reduce their public profile as a result. Authorities have banned LGBTQIA+ events such as the Istanbul Pride march on security grounds and used



water cannon, rubber bullets and tear gas to break up these events when they went ahead without permission. Around 100 people participated in unauthorised Istanbul Pride events in July 2024, 15 were reportedly arrested.

3.150 Individuals who have shown support for LGBTQIA+ causes have faced charges and discrimination. Four students from Bogazici University who displayed a rainbow flag alongside an image of a Muslim sacred site in 2022 were detained and expelled from their school. In another case, an LGBTQIA+ university student who participated in a Pride march had their scholarship revoked and was evicted from their student accommodation. Merchandise displaying LGBTQIA+ symbols cannot be sold to people under 18 years of age and it is illegal for LGBTQIA+ groups to include under-18s in their activities. In-country sources described the case of a schoolteacher who was dismissed after posting a picture online of herself with her students in front of a rainbow flag. In another incident, a lawyer was detained after posting a picture online of her child alongside the statement ‘There are LGBT children, too’.

3.151 LGBTQIA+ prisoners and detainees are vulnerable to physical violence, harassment and denial of medical services. LGBTQIA+ prisoners often seek medical clearance to move to isolated containment cells on grounds of mental or physical illness. Other LGBTQIA+ prisoners have complained about the use of solitary confinement as inhumane treatment (see also [Conditions in Detention](#)).

3.152 The specific risk faced by an LGBTQIA+ person will vary according to geographic location, socioeconomic status and personal and family circumstances. DFAT assesses LGBTQIA+ people (and those perceived to be LGBTQIA+) face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of employment discrimination, harassment and oral abuse. LGBTQIA+ people face a low risk of societal violence in the form of occasional street attacks. In addition, trans women, especially sex workers, face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of police harassment and arbitrary arrests and a high risk of employment discrimination. State protection is rarely available or adequate for LGBTQIA+ people.

## Conscientious Objectors

3.153 Article 72 of the Constitution states national service is the right and duty of every Turk. Under the *Military Service Act* (1927), males aged 20 to 41 are eligible for conscription and must undertake six months of military service. Under the *Recruitment Act* (2019), recruits can legally reduce their period of service to 28 days of military training for a fee of TRY243,000 (AUD10,500), an arrangement known as ‘paid’ military service. Those already considered draft evaders are not eligible for paid military service.

3.154 Exemption or deferment of military service is possible on a number of grounds. University students can delay service until after their studies. Potential conscripts can be exempted for being medically unfit, for residing outside the country (although if they later return to Türkiye they have to pay a fee) or for ‘proving’ their homosexuality. In-country sources told DFAT a potential conscript could also be exempted if his brother had died while undertaking military service.

3.155 Tests to prove an individual is medically unfit for duty are rigorous. Homosexuality is regarded a psychosocial illness and must be proven through an invasive medical examination by a military approved doctor and provision of photographic evidence. In-country sources told DFAT an assessment of homosexuality by a doctor usually involved an interview with the potential recruit’s family, who may not have been previously aware of his sexual orientation. A recruit found to be homosexual is issued with a ‘pink certificate’, also known as a ‘rotten certificate’ (see also [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)). If a physical disability is claimed, the individual must undergo checks every two years during their period of eligibility to confirm their disability still exists.

3.156 Military authorities issue documents for exemption of service indicating the person has no outstanding liability or obligation in terms of military service. Such documents do not include information on reasons for being unfit. People who are unfit for military service can obtain public or private sector employment without difficulty.

3.157 Authorities maintain a sophisticated database of military service, making evasion for an extended period almost impossible (see [Central Civil Registration System](#)). Any interaction with authorities, such as being stopped for a traffic infringement, can lead to a cross-check of an individual’s military service record. In addition, the barcode in biometric [passports](#) is linked to the database, meaning authorities can identify draft evaders on their return to Türkiye. It is illegal to employ draft evaders or deserters under *Military Criminal Law No. 1632* (1930, amended in

2017) punishable by up to one year in prison during peacetime. In-country sources told DFAT it was difficult for draft evaders to obtain employment and those who did work did so illegally.

3.158 Türkiye's Government does not recognise a right to conscientious objection (the refusal to serve in the military on [religious](#), philosophical or moral grounds) on any basis. Those who do not present for registration at a military recruitment branch are issued a fine and fines continue to be issued for the period authorities consider an individual has evaded conscription. While the law allows for imprisonment as punishment for avoiding military service, in-country sources told DFAT this was not used in practice. Non-payment of fines in Türkiye can, in theory, result in asset seizures and withholding of salary and pensions. There were a very large number of conscription evaders in 2024 and the state lacked capacity to follow-up on most cases. Prison was not used as a penalty for unpaid fines. Turkish men resident overseas are not required to complete military service while they hold a foreign work permit. Those who do not hold a permit are considered draft evaders and may be subject to considerable fines upon their return.

3.159 DFAT assesses conscientious objectors who refuse compulsory military service face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of fines and other penalties, including harassment at checkpoints and during police stops, restricted employment opportunities and limits on their ability to leave the country.


## Asylum seekers and refugees

3.160 According to UNHCR, in 2024 Türkiye hosted the largest refugee population in one country in the world comprising 3.2 million registered Syrian refugees and close to 220,000 'persons of concern' of other nationalities, including Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, and others from Asia and Africa. Some Syrian refugees in Türkiye have voluntarily returned to Syria following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. In March 2025, President Erdogan said approximately 133,000 Syrian refugees had returned voluntarily to Syria and anticipated more doing so as the situation stabilised. Erdogan said Türkiye would continue to facilitate voluntary returns of Syrian refugees but would not force anybody to return to Syria. In January 2025, the Turkish Government announced one adult family member from each Syrian refugee family could visit Syria and return to Türkiye up to three times within a six-month period, to help them make informed decisions about the feasibility of returning to Syria permanently (previously, Syrian refugees who returned to Syria were effectively prevented from returning). Türkiye is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention but maintains a 'geographical limitation' where it does not accept refugees for permanent resettlement from countries outside the European Union.

3.161 In 2014, in response to the refugee crisis stemming from the Syrian Civil War, Türkiye adopted a 'Temporary Protection Regulation', setting out the rights and obligations of people granted temporary protection in Türkiye, as well as procedures for dealing with them. Under this regulation, and drawing on EU funding, the government provides refugees with free education and health services. Refugees are theoretically permitted to work. Formal temporary protection is only provided to Syrians, who are considered to have entered Türkiye in a 'mass influx' since the start of the Syrian Civil War. Other nationalities, including Afghans, can only seek protection under the 'international protection' scheme. Syrians afforded temporary protection are protected from forced return to their country of origin provided they abide by certain conditions (such as remaining in the province where they are registered). DFAT understands individuals afforded temporary protection do not have work rights in all provinces, including Istanbul. In-country sources reported a lack of work rights pushed people into the informal labour market, which, in turn, put them at risk of deportation.

3.162 To remain eligible for temporary protection status, individuals are restricted to residing in the city or province in which they are registered. Once registered, they are issued with a temporary protection identification document known as a *kimlik* (see [Documentation](#)). There are widespread reports of registered Syrian refugees being forcibly deported to Syria, including for having lived or worked in a region outside where they are registered. There have also been cases of Syrians being detained and slated for deportation as a result of not carrying their *kimlik*. A 2022 report by Human Rights Watch detailed abuse and torture of Syrian refugees by Turkish police, including forcing them to sign documents agreeing to 'voluntary' repatriation from Türkiye. In-country sources told DFAT in some cases, courts had issued injunctions to prevent the deportation of Syrian refugees or overturn their removal orders.

3.163 Afghans seeking protection in Türkiye are not eligible for permanent resettlement under a refugee visa. However, they may be able to resettle under other visa categories (e.g. residency/naturalisation) and do so in



practice. To initiate an application for protection, Afghans must present in person at a ‘Provincial Directorate of Migration Management’ (PDMM). They and their family are then provided with an ‘International Protection ID’, allowing them to remain in Türkiye while their application is considered. Attendance at a PDMM can be difficult. As a result, many Afghans remain in Türkiye without registration, leaving them vulnerable to arrest and deportation.

3.164 Not everyone who registers is afforded work rights, leading some to relocate illegally in search of work. DFAT is aware of reports of Afghan refugees being forced to sign documents agreeing to their ‘voluntary’ deportation from Türkiye. Türkiye’s Ministry of Interior reported 65,815 Afghans were apprehended by Turkish migration authorities in 2024. According to the United States-based *Kabul Now*, an online newspaper, Türkiye deported approximately 50,000 Afghans in 2023. In-country sources report [LGBTQIA+](#) refugees are particular risk of arrest and deportation.

3.165 DFAT assesses undocumented asylum seekers in Türkiye are at high risk of official discrimination in the form of arrest and forced deportation. If arrested, undocumented asylum seekers are at moderate risk of official violence in the form of torture and mistreatment in detention. Documented refugees and those under temporary protection are generally able to work legally and access basic services such as [health](#) and [education](#) but face a moderate risk of arrest and deportation should they relocate to a location other than the one where they are registered or, in some cases, if they are stopped by [police](#) while failing to carry their *kimlik*.

## 4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

### ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

#### Extrajudicial Killings

4.1 The overwhelming majority of cases involving unlawful or extrajudicial killings in Türkiye were connected to the conflict between government security forces and the PKK in the southeast. Targeted killings were common in the 1990s when Turkish security forces killed individuals associated with the PKK and Kurdish nationalist movement and the PKK killed political rivals and accused collaborators. A 2017 OHCHR report on the impact of the [State of Emergency](#) on human rights in Türkiye alleged extrajudicial killings by Turkish security forces (see [Military](#)). In-country sources told DFAT extrajudicial killings were rare.

4.2 In a May 2015 report (the most recent available), the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions noted only a handful of trials had proceeded in relation to thousands of unresolved killings, deaths in custody and enforced disappearances that occurred in southeastern Türkiye in the 1990s. The Special Rapporteur expressed concern over the discovery of mass graves believed to contain the remains of victims of enforced disappearances dating back to the 1980s. The Special Rapporteur further noted the lack of a comprehensive approach to the right of remedy and reparation for victims of human rights abuses during that period.

4.3 There are reports Turkish security forces continued to carry out extrajudicial killings against political opponents in Iraq and Syria in recent years. A 2022 report by the Kurdish Peace Institute alleged that as many as eight 'non-combatant political figures and activists' were assassinated by Turkish intelligence or the Turkish military in Syria and Iraq between October 2021 and October 2022.

#### Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.4 In-country sources said enforced disappearances were rare in Türkiye. At its 120th session in February 2020, the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances transmitted one new reported case of enforced disappearance in Türkiye (the most recent) and clarified a further two. Ninety-one cases were outstanding. Most of these related to historic disappearances that occurred in the 1990s during conflict between Turkish security forces and the PKK. Some of those disappeared were reportedly held incommunicado for months and subject to [torture](#).


4.5 There were reports of enforced disappearances following the July 2016 attempted coup, including of accused [Gülenists](#) and others in foreign countries. Human Rights Watch reported in 2024 that Türkiye continued to abduct foreign-based Turkish nationals with alleged associations with the Gulen Movement and forcibly return them to Türkiye for prosecution. This includes, in October 2024 the alleged abduction of four Turkish asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Kenya, including a nephew of Gulen's, all of whom were subsequently returned to Türkiye. A 2021 report by Freedom House identified 58 people repatriated from 17 countries since 2016, including Kosovo, Mongolia, Sudan and Azerbaijan, to face charges in Türkiye, mostly related to association with the [PKK](#) or the Gulen Movement, but also leftist movements and international terrorist organisations. Many of these repatriations were reportedly carried out by the Turkish [National Intelligence Organization](#) (MIT) without the knowledge or consent of local authorities.

#### Deaths in Custody

4.6 In its 2023 *Human Rights Violations Report* (the latest available), the IHD recorded 42 deaths in prison due to illness, suicide or violence and another six deaths under police custody. In a December 2017 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment noted while autopsies were routine in cases of deaths in custody, it was not possible to assess whether they were conducted in accordance with international minimum standards.

### DEATH PENALTY

4.7 Türkiye abolished the death penalty for peace time offences in 2002 and in all circumstances in 2004. The last known execution in Türkiye took place in 1984. President Erdogan has repeatedly said he is open to reintroducing capital punishment. Following the passage of the April 2017 constitutional referendum, Erdogan told supporters he



would approve any bill to reinstate the death penalty and suggested another referendum to gauge the level of support. In August 2019 Erdogan reaffirmed his position after the murder of a woman by her ex-husband sparked national outrage. At the time of writing the government had not taken any steps to reintroduce the death penalty.

## TORTURE

4.8 Article 17 of the Constitution enshrines the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment and the right not to be subjected to penalties or treatment incompatible with human dignity. The *Criminal Code* (2004) criminalises torture and defines it as a serious crime punishable with life imprisonment in aggravated cases. Article 147 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure* (2004) sets legal standards for interviewing suspects to prevent torture and ill-treatment. Article 148 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure* (2004) provides confessions obtained through any bodily or mental intervention that impairs the free will, including torture, shall not be used in evidence and shall not serve as a basis for evidence in any proceedings.

4.9 Despite legal protections, torture has occurred in Türkiye. Torture was particularly common during the conflict between Turkish security forces and the PKK in Southeastern Türkiye in the 1990s and was also common following the 2016 attempted coup, when it was frequently used against alleged members of the [Gülen Movement](#). According to in-country sources and international observers such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, torture during this time included beatings, electric shocks, stress positions, sexual threats and assaults and denial of food, water and medical treatment. It was carried out by [police](#), [Jandarma](#) and [military](#) officials against accused militants, [journalists](#), [human rights defenders](#), [protesters](#) and civil servants.

4.10 In its 2023 report on *Torture in its Various Dimensions in Türkiye*, the IHD reported 1,201 individuals alleged they were subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in 2022, most while in official custody or during transportation by law enforcement. Pro-government media outlets frequently allege torture and mistreatment by the PKK but given their poor journalistic standards and pro-government bias, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of these reports.


4.11 In-country sources told DFAT ‘extreme’ forms of torture – such as electrocution and ‘reverse hanging’, an especially painful form of stress position – were now much less common than in the past but beatings remained common, especially to extract confessions during interrogations. According to in-country sources, police and *Jandarma* routinely use mock executions, threats and intimidation when questioning suspects. The 2019 report (the most recent published) of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment noted allegations of excessive use of force or physical ill-treatment against persons in custody, with a number backed by medical evidence. The CPT visited Türkiye in 2021, 2022 and 2024, but has yet to publish reports on these visits.

4.12 In principle, prosecutors must investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment and the Public Prosecutor must follow up on complaints. Complaints may be brought by victims themselves, by their family or lawyer, by civil society organisations or by a monitoring mechanism such as the Ombudsman Institution. Authorities have also established a hotline to enable families to lodge complaints. Human rights groups state most victims of torture or other ill-treatment do not file complaints with authorities for fear of retaliation. Formal investigations and prosecutions for torture are rare, which in-country sources said created an environment of impunity for perpetrators.

## Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

4.13 Article 19 of the Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of arrest or detention in court. Legislation requires warrants issued by a prosecutor for arrests unless the suspect is detained while committing a crime. Under anti-terrorism legislation introduced at the conclusion of the state of emergency in 2018, suspects can be detained for 48 hours for individual offences and 96 hours for collective offences. In both instances detention can be extended twice with the approval of a judge, amounting to six days for individual offences and 12 days for collective offences. Formal arrest is a later step, separate from detention, and means a suspect is detained in jail until and unless released by a subsequent court order.

4.14 Following the 2016 attempted coup authorities detained tens of thousands of people, including hundreds of lawyers. Those arrested were often denied access to the evidence underlying accusations against them and often experienced different outcomes for near identical cases. The Turkish Government acknowledged many of these



issues and in October 2019 introduced a judicial reform strategy to ensure a more efficient and transparent system. The maximum time an individual can be held in pre-trial detention is seven years. In-country sources said lengthy pre-trial detention sometimes served as a form of summary punishment in politically-motivated terrorism cases (see also [Political Opinion](#); [Media and Journalists](#)).

## **Corporal Punishment**

4.15 Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools, detention centres and other state institutions. Article 232 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) prescribes one year imprisonment for the improper use of ‘disciplinary power’ against a person for whom one is responsible. While child abuse is a criminal offence, corporal punishment by parents and other caregivers is not explicitly banned.

4.16 Corporal punishment still occurs, particularly in the home. In-country sources reported wide social and cultural acceptance for corporal punishment in childrearing despite government efforts. Corporal punishment in schools was less likely but could still occur.

## 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### STATE PROTECTION

5.1 Türkiye has a wide range of state protection mechanisms. Its security forces and [judicial](#) institutions are well-established, civilian-run and benefit from a long tradition of public service. In recent years, however, there have been increasing instances of the rule of law being undermined, particularly with regard to those accused of links with the [Gulen Movement](#), [Kurdish](#) nationalists and perceived political critics more generally. While official avenues exist to lodge complaints of human rights abuses and improper treatment by police and other security authorities, a prevailing culture of impunity makes it unlikely a complaint from a high-risk group, such as an [ethnic minority](#) or political activist, would result in prosecution of a member of the security forces.

#### Military

5.2 The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), comprising army, navy and air force, are responsible for territorial defence and have overall responsibility for border security. The President is Commander-in-Chief, while the Chief of General Staff is Commander of the Armed Forces with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the military. According to figures published by NATO, the military had 481,000 active personnel in 2024, the second largest among NATO members behind only the United States. *Global Firepower* ranked Türkiye 8<sup>th</sup> out of 138 countries in its annual review of military strength for 2024. The TSK is currently engaged in security operations in Syria, northern Iraq, Libya and Somalia and in maritime security operations in the Aegean, Mediterranean and Black Seas. The TSK also contributes to NATO, UN and other international coalition operations.


5.3 The TSK played a central role in the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye and has long played a prominent role in Turkish politics and society. The overwhelming majority of Turkish men undergo national service (see [Conscientious Objectors](#)). The TSK has traditionally seen itself as the guarantor of secularist values and carried out several coups in the twentieth century. Since 2002, the government has greatly strengthened civilian oversight and the TSK is now fully under civilian control. Following the 2016 attempted coup, Türkiye's Government dismissed 25,000 military personnel, including 150 generals. Many were allegedly subjected to human rights violations (see [Gulen Movement](#)).

5.4 A 2017 OHCHR report on the impact of the [State of Emergency](#) on human rights in Türkiye detailed numerous allegations of human rights violations committed by both security forces including the military, police and *Jandarma* and the PKK in connection with security operations in the southeast. Allegations included: excessive use of force, [extrajudicial killings](#), [enforced disappearances](#), [torture](#), destruction of housing and cultural heritage, incitement to hatred, prevention of access to emergency medical care, food, water, livelihood and humanitarian assistance, [violence against women](#) and severe curtailment of the rights to [freedom of expression and opinion and political participation](#). The most serious human rights violations reportedly occurred during periods of curfew, when entire residential areas were cut off and movement was restricted around the clock for several days at a time (see [Kurds](#)). The 2023 US Department of State *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Türkiye* reported ongoing violations by Turkish military personnel, including the use of torture.

#### Police

5.5 The Turkish National Police is responsible for law enforcement in Türkiye, with around 330,000 members. The proportion of female police has doubled in recent years to around 15 per cent. While ultimately responsible to the Ministry of Interior, police carry out their duties under the command and control of civil authorities including governors and heads of district administrations. In accordance with the *Law on Duties and Powers of the Police* (2004), the main duties of the police are to prevent crime, provide public peace and order, provide security to people and property and to detect, arrest and transfer offenders and case evidence to the appropriate judicial bodies.

5.6 Following the 2016 attempted coup, the government dismissed thousands of Turkish police, many of whom were subsequently subjected to human rights violations. Investigations into alleged links between Turkish police and the [Gulen Movement](#) are ongoing. In December 2023, the Interior Minister announced 445 police had been suspended while they were investigated for alleged Gulenist connections.



5.7 In-country sources told DFAT while junior officers were poorly paid and overworked, Turkish police were generally professional, well-trained and well-equipped, especially in regard to counter-terrorism operations. Petty corruption is reportedly rare, although there have been corruption scandals involving senior police officials in recent years. In-country sources main criticism of Turkish police was they tended to use excessive force against protesters and when interrogating suspects. In some cases this treatment amounted to [torture](#). According to in-country sources and international and domestic human rights observers, the government has taken only limited steps to investigate, prosecute and punish members of the police and other security forces accused of corruption and human rights abuses (including historical allegations), leading to a culture of impunity.

## Neighbourhood Watchmen

5.8 Neighbourhood watchmen or ‘*Bekcis*’ are a neighbourhood watch force who have existed in Türkiye since the 1960s. Under the *Neighbourhood Watchmen Law (Law No. 7245, 2020)*, Neighbourhood Watchmen are given police-like powers allowing them to stop people in their local area on the streets, ask for identification, conduct random checks and use weapons. The force is comprised almost exclusively of young men supportive of the ruling AKP. They wear a brown police-like uniform. Throughout 2019 and 2020 there were numerous allegations of neighbourhood watchmen harassing citizens with impunity.

## Other Security Forces

5.9 While the TSK has overall responsibility for border control and external security, the *Jandarma*, a paramilitary force, is responsible for rural areas and specific border sectors where smuggling, including of weapons, drugs, cigarettes and fuel, is common. *Jandarma* have similar powers and training to police, in addition to certain military functions. In-country sources estimated the *Jandarma*’s strength at 275,000. The *Jandarma* supervise the ‘village guards’, a civilian militia that provides additional local security in the southeast, largely against the PKK (see [Security Situation](#)). Like the [military](#) and [police](#), the *Jandarma* has been accused of human rights violations, including [torture](#).


## National Intelligence Organisation (MIT)

5.10 The MIT reports directly to the presidency and is responsible for collecting intelligence on existing and potential threats. MIT has the legal power to collect data from any entity without a warrant or other judicial process. Criminal penalties apply to interfering with MIT activities, including data collection or obtaining or publishing information concerning the agency. MIT has the ability to grant its members legal immunity from prosecution and checks on the organisation’s operations are limited. International observers such as the US Department of State and Freedom House have reported the MIT carries out kidnapping or ‘rendition’ operations in foreign countries to repatriate accused enemies of the Turkish state, particularly members of the [Gulen Movement](#).

## Legal system

5.11 Article 9 of the Constitution states judicial power shall be exercised by independent courts on behalf of the Turkish nation, while Chapter 3 (Articles 138-160) details the roles, responsibilities and structure of the judiciary. Article 138 guarantees the independence of the courts, prohibits any authority, office or individual from giving orders or instructions to courts or judges and compels legislative and executive organs and the administration to comply with court decisions without delay or alteration. The judicial system comprises several different courts. General courts of first instance are located countrywide and hear most civil, administrative and criminal cases. A single judge will normally hear minor civil and criminal cases. A presiding judge and two members with a public prosecutor will hear criminal cases involving penalties of more than five years’ imprisonment. Military courts are reserved for [military](#) disciplinary cases only. Turkish military courts have not had jurisdiction to try civilians since 2006.

5.12 The Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) controls the careers of judges and prosecutors through appointments, transfers, promotions, expulsions and reprimands. The April 2017 constitutional amendments (see [Political System](#)) changed the HSK’s configuration with immediate effect. The number of board members was reduced from 22 to 13, six of whom are appointed by the President. The Minister for Justice (a separate presidential appointee) chairs the board, and the Deputy Minister of Justice is a permanent member. Parliament elects the seven remaining board members. The judiciary itself does not have the power to select board members.



5.13 Following the July 2016 attempted coup, Türkiye's Government suspended, detained or dismissed almost one-third of judicial staff, mostly on accusations of affiliation with the [Gülen Movement](#). OHCHR reported the collective dismissals and suspensions of judges through lists issued by the HSK did not follow appropriate procedure, including presumption of innocence and the ability to present a defence. In addition, the arrests of judicial staff breached the *Law on Judges and Public Prosecutors* (1983), which states members of the judiciary can be arrested only when caught in the act of committing an aggravated felony.

5.14 In-country sources reported the departure of senior judges and effective government control of the HSK had affected public perceptions of judicial independence, as less experienced judges were less likely to rule against the government. They also reported the appointment of young, inexperienced, often politically aligned judges and prosecutors had led to an increase in poor judgements, often having to be overturned by higher courts after long delays.

5.15 In-country sources reported increasing barriers to lawyers' ability to defend their clients, including restrictions on client access, breaches of lawyer-client confidentiality and limited access to case materials. Lawyers themselves were frequently arrested, including, in some instances, for statements made in court while defending their clients (particularly when defending clients on terrorism-related charges).

### **Double jeopardy**

5.16 Türkiye ratified Protocol 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights in May 2016. Article 4 of the Protocol states 'no one shall be liable to be tried or punished again in criminal proceedings under the jurisdiction of the same State for an offence for which he has already been finally acquitted or convicted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of the State.' Article 9 of the *Criminal Code* (2004) states a person convicted in a foreign country for an offence committed in Türkiye is subject to retrial in Türkiye. Article 16 provides for the period of detention served elsewhere to be deducted from the final punishment given for the same offence in Türkiye. Where Turkish officials determine Article 9 applies, DFAT understands parallel investigations and verdicts can exist. Moreover, in-country sources told DFAT Turkish authorities had sought extradition for individuals that were rejected on double jeopardy concerns. DFAT assesses Türkiye applies double jeopardy provisions only on an ad-hoc basis.


### **Detention and Prison**

5.17 Türkiye's prison system reportedly suffers from significant overcrowding. According to the US Department of State's 2023 *Report on Human Rights Practices in Türkiye*, prisons were over-capacity by an estimated 44,000 prisoners as of October 2023. In 2024, *Prison Insider*, an online prison information platform, reported Türkiye had the highest per-capita incarceration rate in Europe.

5.18 In-country sources said while sufficient food was generally available to prisoners, the quality was often 'very bad'. It was possible to purchase additional food. Clean water and sanitary toilet facilities were not always available, and heating, ventilation and access to sunlight were sometimes inadequate. There are some reports of guard-on-prisoner violence, as well as prisoner-on-prisoner violence, including sexual assaults. There are reports of invasive strip searches being used punitively against prisoners, including female prisoners (only female guards are allowed to search female prisoners).

5.19 Male and female prisoners are kept in separate facilities or in separate sections of the same prison. Minors are kept in separate facilities to adults or in separate sections of adult prisons, although under-18 female prisoners are reportedly sometimes kept with adult female prisoners. [LGBTQIA+](#) prisoners are normally held separately from the general population. Trans women prisoners held in male prisons are held separately from cisgender male prisoners. There are reports of discrimination, sexual harassment and humiliation of LGBTQIA+ prisoners, particularly transgender inmates.

5.20 In-country sources told DFAT prisoners convicted of terrorism offences, including political prisoners, were held in high-security prisons, usually in solitary confinement. Special conditions applied to these prisoners, as well as to those sentenced to 'aggravated life imprisonment', including limited phone and visit privileges and only one hour per day of interaction with other prisoners. In-country sources told DFAT authorities sometimes intentionally incarcerated political prisoners in facilities far from their homes and families as a form of 'psychological punishment'.



5.21 Several domestic and international bodies have permission or a specific mandate to inspect detention facilities. These include the Special Rapporteur, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Public Prosecutors, the Ombudsman Institution and the NHREI. Police stations and holding cells are subject to inspection by governors, mayors and civil inspectors. Prisoners can complain to the warden of their prison or to institutions such as the Ombudsman or the NHREI, although in-country sources reported these complaints were rarely acted on.

## INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.22 Article 23 of the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of residence and movement. This right may be restricted by law in certain circumstances. Turkish citizens, including members of ethnic and religious minorities, can and do relocate for a variety of reasons. Large numbers of [Kurds](#) and [Alevis](#) have migrated from the southeast to western Türkiye in search of employment and to escape conflict. Turkish citizens who relocate are formally required to have their electoral registration transferred and to receive a certificate of residence issued by the local *muhtar* (an elected village or neighbourhood representative).

5.23 Internal relocation is generally easier for men and family groups. Single women, particularly those fleeing [family violence](#), are less likely to have access to sufficient support services and are likely to face societal discrimination, particularly in rural and more conservative areas.

5.24 DFAT assesses the registration requirement and nationwide reach of security services mean an individual facing adverse official attention is unlikely to be able to escape this through internal relocation. Those facing adverse societal attention may be able to escape through internal relocation, particularly to major urban centres.

## TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

### Exit and Entry Procedures

5.25 Türkiye has a large number of official air, land and sea entry and exit points. Millions of Turkish citizens regularly travel in and out of Türkiye without difficulty. Conflict and instability in Iraq and Syria have led to Türkiye regularly closing its land borders with those countries. The Syrian border is now largely under control. The border with Iran remains porous and is a route for irregular migration. Irregular migration also occurs across the Bulgarian and Greek land borders and by sea via the Eastern Mediterranean. The vast majority who take these routes are non-Turkish migrants from Africa and the Middle East. Particularly since the 2023 general elections, the Turkish Government has had a very strong focus on combating illegal migration.

5.26 Turkish authorities maintain databases for immigration and law enforcement officers. The General Information Gathering System, which provides information on arrest warrants, previous arrests, travel restrictions, military service records (see [Conscientious Objectors](#)) and taxation status, is available at most air and seaports across the country. A separate border control information system used by the police collates information on past arrivals and departures. The Judicial Records Directorate maintains records of past sentences. The [Central Civil Registration System \(MERNIS\)](#) maintains information on civil status information.

5.27 Article 23 of the Constitution states a citizen's freedom to leave the country may be restricted only by decision of a judge based on a criminal investigation or prosecution. Those who have been charged or are on bail are unable to depart. Under the state of emergency, the government imposed international travel restrictions on officials, academics and other official passport holders who had to obtain permission to depart. These measures have now been removed and no Turkish citizens require an exit permit.

5.28 Following the 2016 attempted coup, authorities cancelled the passports of large numbers of people alleged to be associated with the [Gulen Movement](#) and their family members. DFAT is aware of cases where individuals have claimed, despite a court or inquiry commission decision lifting their travel ban, to have been refused a travel document. DFAT assesses the range of information databases and sophisticated identity systems would make it very difficult to leave the country via an airport without legal documentation. However, it may be possible for Turks to leave the country for Europe either overland or via boat without coming to official attention.

## Conditions for Returnees

5.29 DFAT understands it is not a crime for Turkish citizens to seek asylum overseas. Although there is limited information available on conditions for failed asylum seekers who have returned to Türkiye, DFAT is not aware of any significant stigma attached to this group. Türkiye's sophisticated information databases mean failed asylum seekers are likely to come to the attention of the government if they have a criminal record or are a member of a group of particular interest, including the [Gülen Movement](#), [Kurdish](#) or [opposition political activist](#), [human rights activist](#), or [draft evader or deserter](#).

## DOCUMENTATION

### Central Civil Registration System (MERNIS)

5.30 The *Civil Registration Services Law* (2006) is the main legislation covering all aspects of civil registration. Türkiye has maintained an online Central Civil Registration System (MERNIS) since 2000. MERNIS is a centrally administered system containing information previously kept in civil registries nationwide, including information used to determine the rights and obligations of persons, their identity, family relations, nationality and civil status. MERNIS records any change in civil status in real time following amendments made by any of the 973 civil registration offices located throughout the country. MERNIS shares the information kept in the central database with public sector institutions and agencies to enable easy, fast and secure delivery of public services to users.

5.31 The Identity Information Sharing System (KPS) commenced operation in 2005 as an extension of MERNIS. Public institutions and agencies can access information stored in the MERNIS database via the KPS under strictly specified conditions. KPS works over a Virtual Private Network and every user has a unique username and password. The system keeps logs of every user and enquiry conducted.


5.32 The Address Registration System (AKS) is a national address database integrated with MERNIS. It holds up-to-date domicile and other address information of Turkish nationals and foreigners domiciled in Türkiye. The declaration of a new domicile address by the resident is sufficient to enter a new address into the AKS, with the previous address archived. In cases of a suspicious declaration, the *Civil Registration Services Law* (2006) gives officials the power to instigate an enquiry and file a criminal complaint with the judicial authorities if necessary.

5.33 Since 2000, MERNIS has allocated every Turkish citizen a unique 11-digit individual identity number (the TR identity number), intended to resolve problems arising from identical names. The number facilitates registration of all civil status events from the moment of birth and is intended to provide fast and efficient public services by enabling the exchange of identity information between public institutions and agencies.

### National Identity (ID) Cards

5.34 Civil registration offices issue national identity (ID) cards, which are compulsory for all citizens from birth and must be carried at all times. The cards are required for a wide range of everyday activities, including work, access to health and social services, registration to vote, access to courts, obtaining a passport or driver's licence, registration for school or university, registration of property or vehicle ownership and obtaining telephone, internet, and home utilities. Biometric identity cards went into effect in January 2017. Biometric cards contain tight security standards to hinder duplication, falsification and forgery. They have a 10-year validity and contain a smart chip capable of holding up to 1GB of information, including the user's finger and palm prints. All citizens were required to surrender their old ID cards for the new biometric cards by 2023. Türkiye uses similar biometric cards for other forms of identification including residence permits and diplomatic IDs.

5.35 Non-citizen residents are issued with ID cards specific to their visa/residency status (e.g. diplomats receive a diplomatic ID card). The Turkish Government also issues 'International Protection Applicant Identity Documents', 'International Protection Status (refugee, conditional refugee, subsidiary protection) Holder Identity Documents' and 'Temporary Protection Identity Documents (for Syrians)', which play the same role as *kimlik*s/national identity cards. Similarly, 'Foreigner Identity Documents' are issued for foreigners of Turkish descent. The issuance of an ID card does not automatically convey Turkish citizenship.



5.36 The front page of the biometric national ID cards contains the following information: holder's photograph, full name, sex (E for male and K for female), date of birth, and TR identity number, in addition to the ID card serial number and expiry date. The back page contains the holder's parents' names and ID card serial number.

5.37 The *Law on the Protection of Personal Data* (2016) stipulates personal data may not be processed or transferred abroad without the individual's explicit consent. Personal data is defined as information on race, ethnicity, political thought, philosophical beliefs, religious affiliation, appearance, membership in organisations, health, sexual life and criminal record, as well as security-related information and biometric and genetic data. Personal data may only be transferred to a foreign country if there is adequate protection in the receiving country, a written assurance of that protection, and permission from the government data protection authority. Some legal experts have asserted the law fails to protect personal data adequately, as it introduces a series of exceptions giving the state flexibility in collecting and using private data. In 2019 the European Commission said Turkish data protection was not in line with European standards and a more comprehensive and coherent legal framework was required for the confiscation of proceeds of crime and to improve capacity to manage frozen assets.

## Passports

5.38 The *Passport Act* (1950) governs the issuing of passports to Turkish citizens and citizens of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The Interior Ministry approves and issues passports. Passport applicants must apply in person at the General Directorate of Population and Citizenship Affairs, which has offices in every province. Applicants must provide two passport photographs, their national identity card, proof of payment and, if applicable, an original copy of their previous passport. Applicants are also required to provide their fingerprints, which are stored in a centralised computer database along with the applicant's photograph. Once the application has been centrally approved, the passport is delivered to the applicant's address. Procedures and requirements to obtain a passport from abroad are the same as within Türkiye. Applicants must apply in person at a Turkish diplomatic mission and make payment in local currency.

5.39 Türkiye introduced biometric e-passports containing information about the holder's facial features in 2010. Non-biometric passports ceased to be valid in November 2015. E-passports have a maximum validity of 10 years (five years for applicants aged under 18 years). Passport validity varies from six months to 10 years and depends on the fee the applicant is willing to pay. Türkiye issues six different kinds of passports: red-cover individual (ordinary) passports, green-cover special passports (issued to civil servants and their families, mayors and former parliamentarians), grey-cover service passports (issued to civil servants undertaking official travel, their spouses, and single children aged under 25 year and residing with their parents), black- or navy-cover diplomatic passports (issued to diplomats, MPs and a wide range of senior government officials) and pink-cover temporary or emergency passports issued by Turkish diplomatic missions abroad. Separately, the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) issues special travel passports for foreign nationals, used in deportation cases.

5.40 Emergency decrees introduced following the July 2016 attempted coup authorised the confiscation of passports of individuals under investigation or prosecution (*Decree 667*), as well as those of their family members (*Decree 673*). According to Freedom House, between 2016 and 2021, more than 230,000 passports belonging to suspected government opponents were cancelled (some cancellations were later rescinded and passports restored). DFAT understands the majority of cancelled passports were special (green) passports. In some cases, Türkiye's Government cancelled or refused to issue passports to suspected [Gülenists](#) and their family members abroad.

5.41 Inside Türkiye, passports are not issued to people legally considered [draft evaders](#) where those details are registered in MERNIS. Passports are issued to people who have not undertaken military service but are yet to be sanctioned and there is no requirement for proof of completion of military service to satisfy passport issuance requirements. At Turkish diplomatic missions abroad, passports are issued to draft evaders to allow them to return to Türkiye to complete their military service, although this may be a limited validity document.

## Prevalence of Fraud

5.42 International sources report the introduction of biometric e-passports in 2010 and ID cards in 2016, and the expanded use of computerised database systems, has greatly increased the security of these forms of identification. Fraud and forgery involving Turkish documentation are rare but forgeries of foreign documents, such as fake EU and US visa labels, are available in Türkiye and commonly used by people smugglers to facilitate travel by their clients.